

"Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development"

Speech of Ms. Tamar Zandberg, Minister of Environmental Protection of Israel

On the occasion of the High Level Political Forum General Debate on the Sustainable Development Goals

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Mr. President, Colleagues,

The SDGs are a major accomplishment of multilateralism. The Goals reflect the aspirations and priorities of Member States, and draw on the collective knowledge of civil society and academia. The UN generally, and ECOSOC in particular, fulfill an invaluable role in supporting countries in their evidence-based decision-making, including on interconnected health and environmental issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic is just another reminder of the need for this international cooperation.

But we must not forget the two other existential challenges facing our planet – climate change and biodiversity loss. These global emergencies demand that we maintain, even increase the pace of multilateral cooperation.

Since becoming the Minister of Environmental Protection just one month ago I have put Climate Change at the center of my Ministry's policies. We will be submitting an ambitious updated commitment by COP 26 in Glasgow. No longer a per capita, business as usual reduction, but a genuine GHG reduction goal of 27% by 2030 and of 85% by 2050. We will be imposing a carbon tax, and drafting clear sectoral goals so that all sectors of the economy will know what they need to do and by when. There will be clear oversight and an independent expert commission to see that we are working in the right direction and how we can increase ambition.

We will increasingly rely on electricity to fuel industry and public and private transportation, and this electricity will come from renewable sources. I am convinced that these steps not only benefit us and future generations in terms of environmental and general wellbeing but they are an economic necessity. We don't want to be left behind.

It may sound strange, but COVID-19 has given us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to undertake a fundamental change in approach, and we must not miss this opportunity. We are now obliged to make massive investments and these must be directed to the right places. Agenda 2030 provides a clear blueprint as to what we want to achieve, how to get there and how to measure our progress.

Mr. President,

We are here not only to relate our domestic commitments but to give expression to our international solidarity, particularly with countries whose development progress has taken a terrible turn for the worse since COVID-19. It is devastating to see how the achievements that had been made in education and poverty eradication, for example, were delivered a terrible setback.

In the years since its establishment, the State of Israel has developed expertise in various fields, and has been sharing this expertise globally. We will continue to share this knowledge, including practical solutions we have developed, with countries facing similar challenges.

In this regard, I would like to mention "Desertech", a center in southern Israel that is focused on the development of desert-related technologies, policies and research, and is building on Israel's strengths in fields such as water management and resource-efficient agriculture.

We have all learned many lessons in the fight against COVID-19 – on the importance of scientific research, cooperation, transparency, the dangers of unbridled development that ignores what nature provides, and of course, the importance of community resilience.

Whatever challenges may lie ahead, looming just over the horizon, let us join our energy and our determination, and address them together.

Thank you.