

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Statement by

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expedite implementation

Air pollution/atmosphere (E/CN.17/2007/4)

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Check Against Delivery

Thank You, Mr. Chairman.

Allow me, at the outset, to commend you for your leadership of this preparatory meeting and for the direction of the proceedings.

Mr. Chairman,

Air quality in Israel is impacted by increased electricity production, growing vehicle use, industrial development, rising standards of living and growing population density. In the last decade alone, the number of vehicles on the road has nearly doubled as has electricity consumption. In addition, Israel, located in the arid region of the Middle East, is exposed to natural dust episodes from the surrounding desert areas.

Israel's air quality policy is based on European policy and standards. It includes several elements such as prevention of air pollution through the integration of environmental considerations and physical planning; monitoring and inspection; legislation and enforcement including ambient and emission standards; negotiated agreements with the industrial sectors; improvement of fuel quality; reduction of pollutant emissions from motor vehicles and research and international cooperation.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection has been investing efforts in abating air pollution since its establishment in 1988. The 1990s will be remembered as the decade in which a national struggle was waged that was successful in significantly reducing sulfur dioxide emissions, which were one of the most problematic pollutants in Israel. During the current decade, we are continuing our work and already have succeeded in improving the quality of fuels, setting new regulations, reducing industrial emissions, increasing enforcement and promoting the use of economic measures for encouraging cleaner technologies.

Israel's national air quality monitoring network includes 25 monitoring stations linked to a national control center that provides real-time information about air quality and forecasts throughout the country. This information facilitates enforcement of air quality standards, serves planners on regional levels, and informs the general public about air quality levels as it is published on the internet and in the newspapers.

In addition, a new and comprehensive air resources management system, based on a European model, is currently being established. Implementation of the system in the coming year will mark a major leap forward in managing Israel's air resources. The system will provide a variety of tools to forecast the state of the country's air quality, analyze pollution events and facilitate policy making and planning. It will cover the entire country and be based on an emissions inventory from all pollution sources (power plants, industry, transport, households) as well as on meteorological, topographical, and geographical data. In harmony with the Ministry's goal of increasing public awareness, the information from the system will be published on the internet.

Mr. Chairman,

Vehicular air pollution is a severe problem in Israel. It affects large segments of the population in both densely populated metropolitan areas and in inland areas, which are exposed to secondary pollutants such as ozone. In recent years, there has been a focus on improving the fuel quality of vehicles. Today, only diesel and gasoline with a 50 ppm sulfur content is available, following a legislative order prohibiting the import or production of fuel with a higher content. Some gas stations already carry diesel with a 10 ppm sulfur content for the newer vehicles. Another successful example can be found in the significant reduction of lead concentration in emissions. In 2004, a new standard was set that completely phased out leaded gasoline in Israel.

Today, all new imported vehicles must comply with Euro 4 standards, which require a combination of advanced engine technologies and effective systems for the treatment of exhaust gases. These standards will substantially reduce the levels of nitrogen oxide gases and particulate matter emitted by cars. At the same time, however, the continuous increase in Israel's vehicle fleet and number of kilometers traveled will mitigate the efficiency of this reduction, requiring complementary steps within the framework of transportation policy.

From March 2006, all gasoline powered vehicles in Israel (beginning with 1995 models) must undergo stringent air pollution checks within the framework of the annual car registration test. The new test is significantly different from its predecessor and calls for concentration measurements of pollutant emissions from gasoline vehicles at higher engine speeds. The new requirements are based on the provisions of European Council Directive EC 96/96 on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles.

The Ministry of Finance has implemented a higher excise tax rate on diesel fuel. Plans are on the table for adjusting purchase taxes on new car models, based on the level of their emissions.

Many of the policies introduced for promoting cleaner transportation measures in the past years have been aimed at increasing the supply of high quality mass transport systems, while decreasing the attractiveness of private car use. In 2003, the government set a five year development plan to significantly upgrade the national rail system. The international airport has been linked to Tel Aviv by a metropolitan suburban train and the railroad to Jerusalem was upgraded and reopened. Large investments are also being made to develop new urban mass transport systems. In Jerusalem, a light rail system is under construction to be completed by 2009. A light rail is in an advanced stage of planning in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. In contrast to the notable achievements of the policies to increase the supply of high quality mass transportation systems, implementation of those policies aimed at decreasing the attractiveness of car use remain a national challenge.

Limits on air pollution from industrial sources (whether power plants, cement factories, or quarries) are imposed by a variety of means including administrative directives,

business licensing conditions and ambient and emission standards. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Manufacturer's Association of Israel signed a Covenant on Implementing Standards of Air Pollutant Emissions into the Air at the beginning of 1998. Within the framework of the agreement, conditions for emission reductions have been incorporated into the business licenses of the country's 150 major industries. The Ministry is currently updating the emissions standards for industry based on Best Available Technology, through policy discussions with the Manufacturer's Association and the relevant non-governmental organizations.

We are in the process of advancing a proposed Clean Air Act for Israel which should bring together the different legal frameworks that exist for regulating air quality into one piece of cohesive legislation. The proposed law will delegate quite a bit of responsibility to the local authorities for reducing air pollution in their jurisdiction in the areas of urban planning, mass transit systems and traffic management.

One of the major changes of recent years in the area of energy and air pollution is the market shift that is underway from heavy fuel oil to the use of natural gas. It is expected that almost 50% of total electricity generation will be based on natural gas within a decade. The National Master Plan for the distribution and transmission of natural gas includes an offshore and onshore route to maximize the possibility of supplying natural gas to major power plants and to industrial areas.

Increasing the energy efficiency of power stations is of high national priority. Natural gas plants that use the combined combustion technology with the "joint heat and power" method (cogeneration), reaching 75%-80% energy efficiency, are to replace some of the old plants, which operate at less than 40% energy efficiency. In addition, the Public Utility Authority (PUA) – Electricity, has issued guidelines and regulations providing premium payments to private electricity producers (non residential at this time), using renewable technologies. Payment of the premiums is based on external costs of the displaced air pollutants by type and quantity, which is the first step in the process of administering an environmental quality tariff. To date, ten private producers of electricity receive the premium for using renewable energy resources.

The lack of local energy resources led Israel to devote efforts to energy research and development especially in the area of solar energy. Regulations require that all new buildings be equipped with solar collectors for water heating. Plans are now going forth in Israel to establish a 100 MW solar power plant in the northern part of the Negev desert. The technology is available but the cost is still too high to compete with alternatives, particularly when considering the low cost of natural gas.

Mr. Chairman,

The foremost challenge facing decision makers today is to ensure the availability, quantity and quality of energy supply, in the short and long ranges, at minimal economic, social and environmental cost.

While we are faced with many challenges we remain committed to achieving our sustainable development goals. Much progress has been made in recent years and we shall continue our efforts to mitigate air pollution from all sources – energy, industry and transportation.