

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for the opportunity, to address the opening segment of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. I would like to commend President Akram, for his leadership of the Economic and Social Council, during this challenging year, as well as express appreciation for his stewardship of the HLPF, which has become a mainstay of the work of the United Nations.

I would also like to commend the 34 countries, presenting their Voluntary National Reviews. Your commitment to the 2030 Agenda, even in times of crisis, is deeply appreciated.

Dear colleagues,

It goes without saying that, the COVID-19 crisis has upended all of our best laid plans, and set back progress, across the entirety of the sustainable development agenda. I do not need to elaborate on these, well documented, details. What I would instead ask of you today is: what would YOU do differently?

If we ask ourselves, 'what has held back progress and what can we change?', we begin to look at a future, that is not constrained by systems and procedures, that may no longer be relevant, to today's world. This is how we move forward; we build anew.

My friends,

Rarely in the history of our planet, has a society been given the opportunity, for such radical change. While the pandemic is first and foremost a tragedy, we cannot ignore the fact that, it is also an opportunity. For the first time in generations, we have widespread public and political support, for true, transformational change. This, coupled with vast resources, intended for recovery, allow for more than small fixes or adjustments. This time, we can turn it around, and put our societies on a course, that is more sustainable, more resilient, more equitable and more just.

Dear colleagues,

I have four recommendations on how we can make this a reality:

► First, we need to take a closer look, at the global financial architecture. The unfortunate reality is that, the current system, which is predicated on volatile elements, such as availability of ODA, foreign investments, and the heavy burden of debt, simply does not allow, for meaningful progress on sustainable development. We need inclusive and innovative financing systems, that expand access to concessional lending, debt relief, and debt for climate swap mechanisms, so that all countries can benefit. This is particularly important for Least Development Countries, Middle-Income Countries, Small Island Developing States, and countries in special situations, that are struggling to overcome the barriers, to accessing finance.

Underscoring all of this, must be a people-centered approach, one that prioritizes, addressing inequality and closing gaps, whether in poverty or digitization or elsewhere. We can no longer afford, morally or fiscally, to focus on numbers and definitions alone. To meet the 2030 Agenda's vision, we need to change the landscape, of investment in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. Let me be clear: structural gaps cannot be the reason, that we

fail to provide the most vulnerable countries, with adequate support. We can and must do better, to fulfill the promise of leaving no one behind.

▶ My second point refers to the need, to rapidly expand digitization. As I emphasized during the High-Level Thematic Debate on Digital Cooperation and Connectivity in May, the digital divide, is rapidly becoming the new face of inequality. We cannot expect to make meaningful progress across the SDGs, while half of the global population, is taking zoom calls and doing banking online, and the other half, has little to no internet access at all. Education, healthcare, jobs, and economic growth, all depend upon the opportunity to access the innovations of the world around us.

For the international community, the answer is simple: invest heavily in SDG accelerators, such as digital access and energy access, that will quickly empower billions of people. The socio-economic impacts of this cannot be overstated.

▶ My third point, refers to the ever urgent need, to close the gender equality gap. It is well known that, the COVID-19 pandemic, has had a disproportionate impact on women. Domestic violence has often increased. Enacting and implementing legislation, to end all forms of discrimination and violence, against women and girls, and expanding women's representation and participation, in all aspects of public life, are critical. As we roll-out socio-economic recovery, we must be cognizant of these concerns, and ensure that, gender markers and targets are available.

▶ My final point, is on the need for a green recovery, that helps reconcile our relationship, with the natural world. The COVID-19 pandemic, has encouraged reflection on our relationship with the environment. This crisis has highlighted the importance of adequate preparedness, for disaster response and appropriate risk management. This opportunity should be used, to rethink the way our economies function, using approaches, that enhance both resilience and efficiency, such as the circular economy and sustainable transport connectivity, which can be deployed in a regional context.

Protecting and restoring ecosystems, as well as protecting biodiversity, and avoiding land degradation, are proven means of strengthening resilience, to future pandemics and building back better.

Likewise, investing in renewables, offers a source of jobs and livelihoods, and increases access to energy, and the potential for new sectors, all the while contributing to a reduction in carbon emissions.

Colleagues,

There is coherence across the points I have made. If we are intent on reforming the global financial architecture, and offering debt relief and investment opportunities, can we not do this, with the conditions that I have just outlined? Can we not specify that, any funding or debt relief, include support for a green recovery, a gender equality recovery, a recovery that addresses the energy and digital divides?

These options are all realistic, pragmatic and on the table. The only obstacle to us, pursuing such a profound recovery, with the untapping of resources required, is our own hesitation.

Let us move past this. Now is not the time to be tepid or timid, in our approach, let us be bold and transformative, deliberate and restorative. The future of sustainable development is inclusive, resilient, and green. Let us seize this moment.

I thank you.