

**HLPF 2020**  
**Speech of Mr. İbrahim Şenel**  
**Deputy Head of T.R. Presidency, Strategy and Budget Office**

**July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General,  
Distinguished Delegates,

It is a great privilege for me to be joining you today from Ankara for this high-level debate.

Last year in New York, our leaders have launched the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development in order to accelerate progress for achieving the SDGs. However, shortly after the SDG Summit, the COVID-19 cases began to break out and evolved into a global pandemic, striking health systems, economies and labour markets. The world is currently witnessing rapid changes imposed by the pandemic.

Over the past few months, access to internet and digital tools have gained a huge importance in our daily lives. Billions of people have experienced isolation and distant working. Despite the rapid progress on internet and artificial intelligence technologies, this crisis poses intensifying vulnerabilities and inequalities within and between countries – the very challenges that the SDGs are pursuing to address.

The current global health crisis worsened the already fragile conditions of the systems and the institutions of the countries. It is expected that COVID-19 could drive global poverty up, for the first time since 1990s. For many millions of people, basic services remain out of reach and most countries lack the necessary infrastructure to deal with the pandemic.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that our pledge to act on SDGs in our national and global endeavors will help us fighting against these persisting challenges. The SDGs are, after all, our shared agenda for an inclusive and sustainable development pathway and instrumental for a robust recovery. I would like to thank VNR countries for their commitment and hard work. And hereby, I would like to share my country's experience in responding to the global outbreak.

Thanks to our strong public health care infrastructure and dedicated health care professionals, Turkey has been prepared for the COVID-19. During the outbreak, health sector investments have gained priority. All health care services, including testing and treatment, is offered free of charge to everyone, including 4 million refugees.

Turkey also responded to the needs of more than 130 countries, and ranks third worldwide in supplying medical aid and support including personal protection equipment as well as ventilators made in Turkey.

We have also launched the social protection shield program to cater urgent needs during the pandemic. This program included short-time work allowance, unemployment benefits, cash support and social assistance. More than six million households have been reached through this program. Taxes, social security premiums and loans of many SMEs have been postponed.

Distinguished Delegates,

As international community, we all must help each other by all means to take the necessary preventive and mitigating actions. I have full confidence that our discussions today provide effective tools to recover from the pandemic.

Thank you for your attention.