**REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN**

**NATIONAL Development COUNCIL AND**

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**STATEMENT BY DR. PRATIBHA MEHTA**

**UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR**

Your Excellency, President of Tajikistan, Mr. Emomali Rakhmon
Ministers, Ambassadors, Development Partners
Distinguished participants,

I would like to start by thanking you, Mr. President, for your visionary and inspiring opening remarks and for the honor to address the National Development Council on behalf of the United Nations in Tajikistan. I particularly appreciated the emphasis in your remarks on the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment, strengthening opportunities for youth and the need for a balanced regional development. By focusing on the most vulnerable and excluded people in society, the Government is demonstrating its commitment to human dimension of sustainable development. This is further underlined by Tajikistan’s joining of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in March this year.

I would also like to congratulate the Government on preparing the first progress report on the implementation of the NDS in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the excellent presentation we just heard.

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, adopted by Tajikistan along with all the other UN Member States in September 2015, aims at ending poverty in all its forms through 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including the “unfinished business” under the earlier Millennium Development Goals. It envisages a world free of poverty and ensuring human rights, equality and non-discrimination with a core principle to “leave no one behind” by targeting development response and resources.

In the context of Tajikistan, those at risk of being left behind include 17% of children suffering from stunting due to malnutrition. 50% of all maternal and child malnutrition is associated with lack of safe drinking water and inadequate sanitation. While, Tajikistan has been very successful in reducing overall poverty rates, it still remains high in rural areas, in 2017, only 12% rural population reported having no problems with access to adequate food. Women are underrepresented in formal workforce and in decision making positions in the Government and parliament, and girls are dropping out of school earlier. High proportion of youth out of education and without jobs not only reduces Tajikistan’s productive capacity, but also prevents such youth from fulfilling their potential. People living with disabilities face unique challenges. For example, only 13% of vocational training institutions are adapted for people with disabilities. Around 16.8% of children up to the age of 2 do not have a birth certificate. Lack of a legal identity also hamper stateless people to receive full range of government services. Targeted actions and resources will be needed to each of these population groups and many more who are at risk of being left behind.

Since the adoption of SDGs in 2015, Tajikistan has successfully integrated SDGs in NDS, has become the first country in Central Asia to present its Voluntary National Review at the High-Level Political Forum under the UN ECOSOC in 2017, and also producing the first progress report on implementation of the NDS in the context of the SDGs.

Excellency, I would like to congratulate you for your personal leadership in the preparation and adoption of the UNGA Resolution on the International decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028 and for organizing two highly successful international conferences on Countering Terrorism and Extremism and Water for Sustainable Development, both were highly relevant in framing the global response to SDGs.

Less than 13 years remain to achieve the SDGs and the road to 2030 will be tough. While the NDS and related sector strategies are more than 70% aligned with the SDGs, significant gaps remain, particularly in relation to SDG 1 on Poverty, SDG 2 on Hunger, SDG 10 on Inequalities, SDG 12 on Sustainable Consumption and Production, and SDG 16 on Inclusive Societies. But even those SDGs that are very well integrated, such as Health, Education, Gender, Water, Energy, Growth & Jobs, Infrastructure and Industrialization, and Climate Change, need tremendous implementation efforts to be achieved.

In this regard, most critical to the achievement of the SDGs and the NDS by 2030 is ensuring that all the necessary means to implement the SDGs are fully and effectively in place. These center around four main issues.

First, some of the key factors for achieving the SDGs are also among the hardest to address, as they are cross-cutting and do not neatly fit into the mandates of individual Ministries and State Committees. While income poverty has reduced significantly, eradicating poverty in all its forms would require investments in non-monetary aspects of poverty related to increasing access to and the quality of universal health coverage, nutrition, education, legal protection and other public services. This will not only contribute to increasing the human capacity of the country to become more productive but also globally competitive. Climate change, if unchecked, has the potential to severely undermine the gains made in food and energy security due to increasing water stress, disaster risk and environmental degradation. Very positive progress has been made to improve maternal and child heath under MDGs and overall for child development since the Government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, but reaching every child with integrated services and investing in youth empowerment and Early Childhood Development is critical for ensuring a bright future for the country. And all this can only be achieved if actions are firmly underpinned by the Rule of Law, guaranteeing the rights of citizens and their protection from any form of discrimination.

These and many other complex issues require rethinking the way the Government is institutionally set up and capacitated to deliver. As well as how the entire society through CSO, private sector and academia is mobilized for achieving the SDGs. Modernizing institutions and governance systems with new skills in line with Tajikistan’s ambition to be a regional and global player; establishing enabling environment for CSO participation and partnership with private sector will be essential in scaling up solutions.

A national multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism such as a permanent national SDG platform to promote “whole of Government” and “whole of society” approach and horizontal linkages could effectively help in integrated solutions for cross-cutting problems.

Second, “leaving no one behind” means reaching out to locations where those left behind live. Localization of the SDGs is a fundamental means to reach every mohalla in the cities, towns and remotest villages in the country. This would not only require empowering local government with fiscal authority but enable citizens to participate in joint planning, implementation and monitoring of results.

Third, SDGs is an ambitious commitment of world leaders which will require creative ways to tap into domestic and new innovative sources of international financing. A recent report commissioned by UN, estimates that nearly 118 billion US dollars will be required to implement the NDS and the SDGs by 2030. This will require stronger public finance management, investing the anticipated hydro- energy revenue from Rogun for social spending; using large sums of remittances for development, perhaps creating enabling environment for people to invest remittance in small businesses rather than using only for consumption; undertaking reforms for incentive-based and rule-of-law led private sector development, which can also contribute in diversifying economy and in creating job, especially for youth.

Fourth, one of the key means for targeted and effective NDS/SDG implementation is reliable and timely data and evidence based decisions on budgeting and policy reforms. Currently, there are many standalone data systems that are not linked or, at times, are contradictory. Streamlining the data and monitoring ecosystem, backed by well capacitated institutional framework, will go a long way in reporting on NDS/SDGs progress and in making timely course corrections.

Excellency, the United Nations system in Tajikistan is fully committed in making every effort to assist the Government and the people of Tajikistan on its path to sustainable development which brings prosperity to all.

Thank you.