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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS WEBINAR MALAYSIA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE DECADE FOR ACTION

Date: 7 August 2020

Opening Statement:

- Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Jeffrey Cheah AO
Founder & Chairman, Sunway Group; Chair SDSN Malaysia

Ministerial Message:

- Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed
Minister in the Prime Minister's Department for Economic Affairs

Panellists:

- Dr Zunika Mohamed
*Deputy D-G (Macro), Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Prime Minister's Dept & SDSN Malaysia
Leadership Council Member*
- Ms Lavanya Rama Iyer
Head for Policy & Climate Change, WWF Malaysia
- Prof Dato' Dr Woo Wing Thy
*Distinguished Professor of Economics, University of California Davis; Vice-President, SDSN ASIA &
Director, Jeffrey Sachs Centre on Sustainable Development*
- Prof Dato' Dr Mazlin Mokhtar
*Director, Institute for Environment & Development (LESTARI) & SDSN Malaysia Leadership Council
Member*

Moderator:

- Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam
*Chairman, Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) & Asian Strategy & Leadership Incorporated
(ASLI) & Corporate Advisor to the Sunway Group.*

On July 1st, 2020, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) launched the Sustainable Development Report 2020. While Malaysia recorded modest improvements in its ranking from 66th position in 2019 to 60th in 2020 out of 166 countries, its main challenges remain. This virtual event convened thought leaders on the various aspects of Malaysia's sustainable development journey who offered insights on areas of opportunity, imperative action and challenges in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Sunway City, 7 August 2020 - The contribution and commitment in embracing the Sustainable Development agenda is not the sole responsibility of the government alone, but also that of all

segments of society, namely the private sector, academia, civil society and every single individual, Sunway Group Founder and Chairman, Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Jeffrey Cheah AO said.

In his opening statement during the Sustainable Development Webinar, organised by ASLI, in collaboration with the Jeffrey Sachs Centre for Sustainable Development, Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah conveyed the good news that Sunway City has been endorsed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UN_SDSN) to oversee the Sustainable Development Agenda for the whole of Asia. Two other cities were also endorsed in this respect, namely New York City to oversee the Americas and Paris to oversee Europe and the Africas.

Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah said he felt honoured and humbled by the recognition accorded to Sunway and reiterated that the most important thing at present is to hit the reset button and go forward.

“The system structures and policies that had governed days of the past will not be as effective in shaping the future progress of the nation. The path towards this transformation had already been mapped out via the 17 SDGs, as a holistic global vision towards building a better world. However, despite the worldwide adoption, the SDGs are still largely perceived to be aspirational. The Covid-19 crisis has offered a genuine opportunity to repair and rebuild our society and the planet,” Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah stated.

In his Ministerial message, Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department for Economic Affairs, said, “We are living in a time of great change, faced with daunting economic challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. The SDGs have become an even more critical component for Malaysia's future development,” Dato' Seri Mustapa asserted.

The Minister also said that the upcoming 12th Malaysia Plan will further embed the SDGs in its Five-Year development plan, along with the Shared Prosperity vision 2030. He further affirmed that efforts will be intensified to ensure that Malaysians understand the importance of SDGs in improving the quality of life. Although it is an ambitious journey, the Minister called upon Malaysians, private sectors, NGOs and individuals to share this responsibility and said he was counting on the strong and continuous support of all Malaysians to ensure a better and more sustainable future for all.

Dr Zunika Mohamed, Deputy Director-General (Macro) in the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and SDSN Malaysia Leadership Council Member, focused on three core aspects in her presentation. She said emphasis should be given to the implementation of the SDGs in Malaysia, monitoring and evaluation and the issues and challenges faced. Among the issues and challenges faced, was the challenge to collect, analyse and utilise the data to generate reports, as well as coordination and funding.

Head for Policy & Climate Change, WWF Malaysia, Ms Lavanya Rama Iyer, reiterated that Malaysia is seen to be facing significant challenges in the areas related to climate action, life below water and life on land according to the 2020 SDG report. The greatest obstacle in the successful implementation of the SDGs, she said, was summed up very well by Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah himself, who had said, “But I believe a major factor is our obsession with unbridled growth, as measured by the metric known as Gross Domestic Product (GDP).”

Furthermore, current negative trends in biodiversity and ecosystems will undermine progress towards achieving the SDGs related to poverty, hunger, wealth, water, cities, climate, oceans and land. Carbon pricing is another issue to be looked at seriously if Malaysia was gearing towards being a low-carbon nation. It was also sad, she asserted that poaching posed a security threat to the Malayan tigers as numbers were fast decreasing.

“As a mega-diverse nation, we should harness nature-based solutions to address issues and challenges we are facing. We must find a path that puts nature, climate and people in synergy with the boundaries of what our planet can provide,” she stressed.

Prof Dato’ Dr Woo Wing Thye, Distinguished Professor of Economics, University of California Davis; Vice-President of SDSN ASIA and Director of Jeffrey Sachs Centre on Sustainable Development emphasised that ranking does not depend on how rich a country is. Instead, it is reliant upon the input of efforts of a nation towards achieving the SDGs.

Malaysia’s achievements, he said, are marred by poor performance in five areas as identified by the SDSN. The five areas are hunger, health of the population, gender equality or the lack of it, reduced inequalities and life on land pertaining to the destruction of wildlife habitat, raising the possibility of species extinction in Malaysia.

Professor Dr Woo, focusing on SDG#2 which is Zero Hunger, was, however, surprised that Malaysia ranked so low on this SDG, considering there was Zero absolute poverty in the country. He explained that two indicators had contributed to the poor ranking of SDG#2. namely hunger and nutrition. He also said it was surprising that Malaysia’s ranking for SDG #2 was very low. As the indicators for SDG #2 are hunger and nutrition, the pertinent question to ask would, then, be how well-nourished Malaysians are.

“It is not a question of ‘*have you eaten enough*’; instead, it should be, ‘*have you eaten good food to nourish your body*’,” he stressed.

The low score of SDG#2, he stressed, is due to the prevalence of stunting and wasting. Stunting refers to below potential height, while wasting is the low weight for a given height. He was of the opinion that stunting in Malaysia is a failure of the education system in teaching the children about food that is nutritious for the body.

Prof Woo concluded by saying that education was vital to right the wrongs and thus, rectify the situation. Moderator, Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam concurred with Prof Woo’s conclusion.

The final panelist, Prof Dato’ Dr Mazlin Mokhtar said it was a bit worrying that the 2020 SDG report showed that there was no data available for SDG#10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG#12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). He urged the Academia to work towards improving this unavailability of information, considering there were about 70,000 academicians and close to 1 million students in Malaysia.

Prof Dr Mazlin alluded to the 2020 SDG Report, and while concurring with Dr Zunika on the lack of collaboration, said it was a matter of concern that SDG#17 (Partnership for The Goals) showed poor performance as well. It is important to scrutinise the targets within the 232 indicators and identify where the problem lies. He queried, “Is it partnership among the academia themselves or

Malaysia with other countries? Let's buck up and work together on this – Academia, Government, the business sector and the community.”

He stated that Malaysia was exemplary in coming forward to assist in times of disasters, while sharing information and resources, but not so during peaceful times when data is not shared. He said the Covid-19 situation is one good example where reporting, monitoring and transparency were the order of the day. He commended the government, chiefly the Director-General of Health, Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah and that Malaysia was in the top ten range of countries handling the Covid pandemic. It should be the same for environmental disasters, he implored.

“While Malaysia performs reasonably well in the economics of the country, the same cannot be said about development. Why is it that when development happens, much of the environment is destroyed? We are jeopardising our natural resources. We have to zerorise or reduce the environmental risk,” he said.

Prof Dr Mazlin reiterated that in order to push the agenda of sustainability in a better way, the country cannot conduct Business As Usual (BAU). BAU means damage is being caused to the earth as it exceeds the Earth's capacity. Instead of BAU, the nation should look to planet renaissance where the virus is contained and there is strong economic and environmental rebound.

On that note, moderator, Tan Sri Navaratnam, in thanking all for their efforts, raised the matter of collaboration. For a start, he said, ASLI, the Jeffrey Sachs Centre, Sunway University, together with NGOs and academia should take the initiative in collaborative efforts. For anyone who is interested to study Sustainability as a discipline, he said Sunway University conducts a Master's programme on the subject.