

Minister of Planning & Economic Development presents Egypt's 3rd VNR at UN HLPF

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Dr. Hala El-Said, Minister of Planning and Economic Development, representing Egypt, presented the 3rd Voluntary National Report (VNR) at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, held in New York this year, virtually via video conference.

Egypt submitted the report in the presence of Dr. Ahmed Kamaly, Deputy Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Ms. Elena Panova, UN Resident Coordinator in Egypt, Irene Jacob, Economist in the Resident Representative's Office, Ambassador Hazem Khairat, Supervisor of the International Cooperation Office at the Ministry, Dr. Mona Essam, Head of the Sustainable Development Unit at the Ministry and Dr. Reham Rizk, Director of the Modeling Unit in the Ministry.

Dr. Hala El-Said, Minister of Planning and Economic Development, asserted that Egypt's 3rd VNR came within the framework of its comprehensive strategy for sustainable development: Egypt's Vision 2030, which was launched in 2016 through a participatory approach, with its economic, environmental, and social dimensions.

El-Said added that since 2018, Egypt has embarked on updating its vision, given the need to confront many challenges, including water scarcity, population increase, as well as global and regional geopolitical developments, and absorbing the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

El-Said noted that the process took place in a participatory framework with all development partners, in line with Africa's Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

El-Said asserted Egypt's focus on localizing the sustainable development goals at the governorate level to address development gaps through evidence-based interventions.

She highlighted the issuance of the Citizen's Plan for the first time in Egypt and the region. It deals with the implementation of the sustainable development goals in each of Egypt's governorates and determines its needs and development gaps as well as setting a competitiveness index at the governorate level.

El-Said also referred to the development of the financing equation for distributing investments at the governorate level, as well as to the interventions on the ground through the "Decent Life" presidential initiative.

Decent Life focuses on the poorest villages, with the participation of many development partners.

She added that the participatory approach was the guiding principle of the report's preparation.

The Egyptian government held a series of virtual workshops with government agencies, the private sector, civil society, and development partners to prepare the report.

El-Said explained that Egypt's 3rd VNR covers all 17 sustainable development goals, and includes challenges and gaps, as well as achievements and success factors.

El-Said also showcased a number of the main objectives of the report, as El-Said talked about Goal 1: (End poverty in all its forms everywhere) explaining that Egypt recently witnessed, for the first time since 1999, a decrease in poverty rates, as it recorded 29.7% in 2019/2020, compared to 32.5% in 2017 /2018. This reflects the success of the economic reform program and the social protection policies.

The minister cited the government's efforts to increase public investment in human capital and ensure the provision of basic services, expand and strengthen social protection networks, including the Takaful and Karama (Solidarity and Dignity) Program, and launch the "Decent Life" initiative, which aims to raise the standard of living for about 57 million Egyptians, equivalent to more than half population.

On SDG 3 – ensuring health and well-being for all – El-Said asserted Egypt's commitment to ensuring good health and well-being for all its citizens and developing the resilience of its health care sector against public health crises.

She referred to the government's efforts in the field of health care, which included the launch of the "100 Million Health Initiative" in 2018 to eliminate hepatitis C and detect non-communicable diseases. The success of the initiative was evident in a 98% decrease in hepatitis C cases.

El-Said explained the pivotal role of civil society in supporting the improvement of health and well-being in Egypt through many preventive and curative initiatives that took place before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Regarding Goal 8 – decent work and economic growth – El-Said revealed that GDP growth accelerated in 2018/2019, to hit 5.6% after it recorded its lowest level ever at 1.8% in 2011. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate also decreased to 7.2% in the fourth quarter of 2020, despite the pandemic. This came after unemployment increased to 9.6% in the early stages of the pandemic.

El-Said also stressed the government's focus on financial inclusion as a priority, through supporting micro, small and medium companies.

El-Said explained that the Egyptian government benefits from effective partnerships with the private sector, especially through the recently established The Sovereign Fund of Egypt (TSFE).

Concerning SDG Goal 13 – take urgent action to combat climate change –

the minister indicated that Egypt has made further progress in mitigating the effects of climate change by strengthening policies and institutional frameworks over the past few years.

El-Said highlighted the launch of the "Environmental Sustainability Standards Guide" to increase green public investments to 50% by 2024/2025.

The government launched the first Egyptian green bonds, worth \$750 million, and is preparing the "National Strategy for Climate Change" that will be launched in late 2021, as well as the "National Strategy for Hydrogen, she continued.

El-Said also referred to the SDG Goal 16 related to peace, justice, and strong institutions, explaining that Egypt achieved in 2019 high levels in many governance indicators.

She explained that the government made many efforts in this regard, including submitting Egypt's report under the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and establishing the National Institute for Governance and Development Sustainable Development (NIGSD) and the National Anti-Corruption Academy, which aims to build capacities in the areas of good governance and sustainability.

El-Said addressed the challenges that impede the implementation of sustainable development goals, explaining that these challenges included the digital divide, between males and females.

"This will be addressed by giving priority to the information technology and communication sector, as part of the second phase of structural reforms, as well as increasing women's participation in the workforce, which represents a major challenge that burdens many of the sustainable development goals," the minister stated.

El-Said explained that to meet this challenge, it is necessary to take into account the economic, social, and cultural determinants in decisions that concern women.

El-Said continued the discussion about the challenges, referring to the environmental challenges, stressing the importance of green projects and green recovery.

El-Said stressed Egypt's commitment to continue taking great steps to implement the sustainable development goals, explaining that two important motivators can accelerate the pace, which are the dissemination of digitization and the expansion of partnerships.

El-Said stressed that no government can move forward alone, as this is a common commitment that can only be achieved through the participation of all development partners, following up on the gradual progress in achieving the sustainable development goals that build the momentum that is more needed to achieve a more prosperous future for the people of Egypt.