



Greening the Economy - From Crisis to Opportunity

Environmental Protection Minister Gilad Erdan's Speech

at Tel Aviv University

Tel Aviv, 20 April 2009

Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Program

Professor Gandal, Head of the Hartog School of Government and Policy, Tel Aviv University

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome Mr. Steiner to Israel and to strengthen the close relations Israel has with UNEP. We believe that even if we are small in size and population, we are part of the global environment community and have developed areas of expertise which could be of interest both to UNEP as the global leader of the environmental agenda and to countries where such expertise could be of assistance.

Greening the economy is a challenge. It raises opportunities for action not only by a Minister of Environmental Protection, but requires cooperation with the economic Ministers and with the private sector.

One of the key concepts of a green economy is using resources efficiently. Israel has longstanding experience and expertise in maximizing the use of limited water resources, particularly in relation to agriculture. It should be a natural step for Israel to build such a concept for facing the energy crisis.

Countries around the world are seeking ways to achieve a low carbon economy, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to raise their level of

energy security. The US government recently rejoined the Kyoto process and is moving towards preparation of greenhouse gas emissions legislation. Israel is currently checking its potential for greenhouse gas emissions reduction, as we join the global effort. I intend to prepare a government decision for a national action plan. This is in addition to the important strategies for energy efficiency and energy conservation. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of National Infrastructure have taken some steps but the challenge ahead of us requires interministerial cooperation to impose a mandatory standard for greening new building, and to improve energy efficiency in existing buildings. We are discussing the possibility of incentives with the Finance Ministry for private building and I intend to propose that the government sets an example by allocating a budget to improve energy efficiency in existing public buildings.

A second concept is the promotion of innovation. Economies move forward when they are innovative and are at the cutting edge of new technologies, benefiting from the advantages of being first movers in the global market. Israel has been an ecoinnovator in the past, particularly known for pioneering the first steps of solar energy. Encouragement of ecoinnovation in all of the government budgets allocated for science and research would not only be beneficial to greening the local economy and providing new job opportunities but could be turned into a green-tech export.

Good governance, including transparency and accountability, is increasingly seen as being essential for a successful company. A few companies in Israel have begun to take corporate responsibility on board and are issuing reports on corporate social responsibility. We shall follow these developments, and will take steps to encourage companies which take genuine steps to improve their environmental performance but expose those which are merely 'greenwash'.

In the long term, integration of the concepts of sustainable development in the educational system is the key to achieving a greener economy. I believe that environmental education is a major focus on the Ministry's agenda.

Greening the economy requires a joint strategy for the whole of government. It is an opportunity for creating a positive partnership with the private sector and with the environmental organizations.

I hope to strengthen the Ministry's capability in environmental economics, consult with leading economists, and build a consortium for greening the economy together with relevant Ministers.

Mr. Steiner,

We welcome your green economy initiative and hope to play an active part in its implementation.