

GILAD ERDAN: ISRAEL'S ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION MINISTER

Gilad Erdan, born in 1970, was sworn in as Minister of Environmental Protection on March 31, 2009 and also serves as the Prime Minister's Liaison to the Knesset. MK Erdan, a member of the Likud faction, was first elected to the Knesset (parliament) in the 2003 elections.



Gilad Erdan / Photo: Knesset website

During your six years of service in the Knesset prior to your appointment as Minister of Environmental Protection you were involved in a wide range of environmental and social initiatives. How does your experience as a Knesset member impact on your activities as a minister?

As a member of the Knesset, I dealt with a wide range of environmental issues and did my best to promote environmental legislation initiatives. In addition, together with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was head of the opposition in the previous Knesset, I helped draft the environmental agenda of the Likud party, an agenda which is now being implemented.

As a member of different parliamentary committees, and especially as chairman of the Economics Affairs Committee, I both participated in and personally initiated numerous environmental bills and programs. The economic perspective is of major importance in planning for a better environment. The financial sector has a key role in promoting sustainable

development and we must convince this sector to incorporate environmental considerations in its decision making process. At the same time, the promotion of innovative environmental technologies and knowhow can benefit both the economy and the environment, in Israel and worldwide.

From my point of view, I am privileged to now have the opportunity to close a circle in so many subjects which I initiated as a Knesset member. I was especially gratified to see a bill which I initiated in the previous Knesset on the obligation to advertise the pollution level of new vehicles gain the approval of the Knesset just a few months after I began my service as Minister of Environmental Protection. Other initiatives which I hope to complete include the promotion of an expanded Deposit Law on Beverage Containers and a Packaging Law.

How do you intend to upgrade the cause of the environment in Israel? What are your plans for improving environmental protection in this country?

My challenge, first and foremost, is to transform the subject of environmental protection into one of the central subjects in the life of the citizen and on the agenda of our government. The constraints faced by Israel as a small country with a high rate of population growth and heavy pressures on its infrastructure should have placed the environment at the top of the public agenda long ago. Unfortunately, our ministry still does not have sufficient authority to effectively tackle major environmental issues and to spearhead a green revolution in this country.

I concluded with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that I will submit for government approval a proposal for the establishment of a committee of experts, including



Green plastic bottles await recycling at Aviv Ltd. / Photo: Yoav Goell



representatives of academia, the public sector, the economic sector and the government, to review the ministry's powers and its ability to overcome the challenges of the 21st century. The Israeli Ministry of Environmental Protection must operate according to modern standards and approaches. It is imperative that its authorities are strengthened, its budget and human resources increased. I intend to act with full transparency and with the cooperation of Israel's environmental NGOs so that we can together best address the critical environmental issues which confront us.

In the first phase, we will do this by focusing on five priority areas: waste, air pollution, climate change, enforcement and education.

Can you elaborate on the five priorities for action which you recently formulated for the Ministry of Environmental Protection?

Our focus on waste includes the entire spectrum of waste management and treatment, from reduction at source to recycling and the development of material recovery facilities. Our goal is to reach 50% recycling within ten years and we are seeking to reduce waste production at source by about 30% - from more than 1.5 kilos per capita today to about one kilo per capita a decade from now. We hope to reach every household in Israel and to launch a wet/dry waste

>We will deal with zero tolerance toward polluters<

separation program for domestic waste, with the wet component, which is also the main component of our domestic waste, going for composting. Of course, our focus on waste also encompasses construction and demolition waste, which is a major problem in Israel.

In terms of air pollution and climate change, we view these as separate and yet interconnected issues. Climate change is a central target which will concomitantly allow us to reduce air pollution in Israel. Thus, the treatment of a global problem, which is of major importance to us, will also allow us to treat our local problem of air pollution. We are now getting ready for the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change, and are carefully studying the issues of climate change mitigation and adaptation in Israel.

Enforcement and education will be our main tools for achieving our targets and we are dedicating major resources, human and financial, both of which are scarce, to these areas. Our intent is to increase, as much as possible, the ministry's direct and indirect enforcement capabilities through the use of economic instruments such as levies and the polluter pays principle, through the advancement of environmental due diligence by the financial sector to review the feasibility of projects through environmental lenses, through an increase in fine levels in court and the imposition of administrative financial sanctions and through increased surveillance and reporting mechanisms such as Pollution Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR). The idea is to use this toolbox to make sure that potential polluters think twice before committing an offense.

In the area of education, we will use every means and every media to make the environment a central item in public opinion, a sure way to upgrade it on the political front as well. We must teach our children to be green consumers, to turn off unnecessary lights, to shut down computers, to save water, to recycle their garbage. By doing this we will gain future consumers who are environmentally conscious and environmentally active.

Of course, in concentrating on these five high-priority topics, we will not leave other subjects by the wayside, whether hazardous substances treatment or radiation, noise or biodiversity, river reclamation or marine water quality, to name but a handful.



Sunrise at Habonim beach / Photo: Eli Ratner





Rosh Hanikra Beach/Photo: Ilan Malester

Environmental issues transcend national borders. How does Israel take part in international efforts to protect the environment, in general, and how is Israel preparing itself for the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in December and for accession to the OECD, specifically?

International cooperation with both organizations and states, along with active participation in global and regional programs and agreements on behalf of the environment, are important components of Israel's environmental agenda. The accession process to the OECD provides Israel with a unique opportunity to upgrade its policies in several areas, including the environment, and to adopt the high standards set by the organization. This is a process in which all parts of the government are taking part.

As to climate change, this is clearly one of the highest priority items on the international agenda, and we, in Israel, have already taken several steps to upgrade the subject on our national agenda as well. In May 2009, the Israel Cabinet approved the establishment of a Ministerial Committee on Environmental Protection and Climate Change, which I head, and, in June, the committee approved my proposal to establish a directors-general team, headed by our director general, to formulate a national climate change plan for Israel which will consist of both mitigation and adaptation measures. The preparation of a greenhouse gas reduction

plan is both an international necessity and a national requirement and it will have the added benefit of reducing air pollution in Israel and serving as a driving force for economic growth which will accelerate the development of Israel's cleantech industry, especially in the area of clean energy.

In short, we are preparing for the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol by reviewing Israel's mitigation potential and the most cost-effective means of achieving greenhouse gas reduction, taking account of Israel's special circumstances. At the same time, our advanced technologies provide us with new opportunities to find innovative solutions to the challenges lying ahead, in terms of both mitigation and adaptation, and to transfer these innovative technologies to countries worldwide.

Based on your declarations since your appointment as Minister of Environmental Protection, it is clear that you attribute great importance to enforcement. What are your goals and targets in this area?

On my very first day as minister, I gathered the ministry's top management and notified them that I will fully back them in every enforcement measure against any and every kind of polluter, whether a national authority or an industry. We will deal with zero tolerance toward polluters. There will be no dispensations or a turning of a blind eye to environmental offenses during my term in office.



Green Police/Photo: Sharon Adi



In line with my position that enforcement and deterrence are among the ministry's primary goals, I appointed a committee which has come up with a new enforcement procedure which will make enforcement more efficient and will substantially minimize the time that elapses between the commission of an offense and the imposition of a penalty.

I have also turned to Minister of Justice Ya'akov Ne'eman with a request to place a judge with environmental expertise in every magistrate's court. As we intensify our enforcement measures, it will become more and more important to have complex environmental cases heard by trained judges with the requisite skills. Such green judges would not only master environmental law but would understand the complexity of environmental issues and their economic and social impacts.

As one of Israel's youngest ministers, how does your personal life experience contribute to meeting the challenges facing you as Israel's Minister of Environmental Protection?

On a personal level, I grew up in Ashkelon, a city in which a coal-fired power plant already operates and another controversial power plant is being considered, so it is only natural that I am well acquainted with the adverse environmental consequences of noxious emissions, including their impacts on public health.

As a father of two young children, I firmly believe in the importance of raising the environmental awareness of the younger generation, and therefore I have decided to place environmental education high on our agenda. Our children today are already more oriented to environmental subjects than their elders and our challenge is to change the consumption and behavioral patterns of both youngsters and adults for the benefit of a better environment.

And finally, as a young minister, I hope that my experience, my energy and my commitment to public participation will help bring about a green revolution in Israel.

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Minister Erdan with Minister Markus Söder / Photo: Yossi Aloni

Israel-Bavaria Cooperation on Management of Protected Areas

Israel's Environmental Protection Minister Gilad Erdan and Bavaria's State Minister for the Environment and Public Health, Dr. Markus Söder, met on August 6, 2009 to sign a joint declaration of intent on cooperation in the management of nature reserves and national parks. Cooperation between Israel and Bavaria, the largest federal state in Germany, will encompass, inter alia, the exchange of experts in order to learn from both states' practices in the areas of supervision of protected areas and environmental education, visitor services and guidance.

Minister Erdan emphasized the fruitful cooperation which exists between Israel and Germany within the framework of the existing agreement between the two countries on cooperation on environmental matters and nature conservation, which was signed in 1993 and constitutes the framework for implementing the declaration of intent.

