



Honorable President, dear Colleagues!

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude for so many Speakers being able to meet in person to this important event. I would like to complement our hosts, the Parliament of Austria, and the IPU for the extensive measures taken to make this conference possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had immense effect on our lives, putting strain on our economies and health systems. No wonder it has gotten much of the attention of politics and policymakers for the past year and a half. But the great challenge of the global climate crisis still looms, with much graver consequences than the pandemic if we don't act united, firmly and soon.

6 years have passed since the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 were declared. Obviously COVID-19 has had a negative impact on our ambitions to reach the goals. Eliminating poverty and hunger, securing good health and well-being, and reducing inequalities has been a bigger challenge in the past few months. A current challenge, in line with SGD no 3, is securing vaccination for all, for the benefit of all.

The big challenge in coming months is adopting to the existence of the virus, and ultimately returning to normal. But that "normal" situation must be a new normal. We must recover economically in a sustainable way with respect for the nature and with eyes on the ultimate target, to reduce emissions and fight rising temperatures, instable weathers and secure the health of the oceans.

Concurrently we should rethink our focus on economic growth as the main parameter for economic success. Much more attention should be on general welfare, such as access to education, healthcare and other factors, in line with the SDGs.

Iceland has in recent years, along with Scotland and New-Zealand, increased its focus on the wellbeing economy and the harmonious relationship between society and nature. This, among other things, involves defining wellbeing parameters that should be reference points, no less than the traditional GDP and employment parameters.

It is my firm believe that we need to focus much more on human well-being and environmental preservation to achieve sustainable development. Social stability reached through equal and just rules and distribution is an important factor in well being and equal progress. After all society is much like a chain, which is only as strong as its weakest link.