

SPEECH

László Kövér, Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly at the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament

Virtual meeting, 19 - 20 August 2020

Esteemed Madame President,
Esteemed Secretary General,
Esteemed Speaker Sobotka,
Esteemed fellow Speakers,

At the time that this virtual meeting of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament is held we are still far from knowing the extent of the damages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, nor the number of lives lost or the losses incurred because our economies were brought to a standstill in order to curb the spread of the virus. We are still under the shock because we have been reminded of our vulnerability and exposure, which we have chosen to disregard up until now from the successfully constructed comfort of our welfare societies. This shock is still palpable even in the societies, like the Hungarian, where the economic decline is not unmanageable, where the epidemiological defence was largely successful also thanks to the timely introduction of restrictions on the movement of citizens, resulting in less infections and more importantly less deaths.

We can still feel hopeful because the Hungarian society has demonstrated exemplary cooperation and solidarity during the days of the pandemic. People diligently obeyed the restrictive measures, introduced with a view to protecting our older compatriots and helped health workers in a variety of ways. Solidarity was also present in the way those experiencing economic losses because of the management of the pandemic were assisted by the state, businesses and citizens alike.

In their modest way, members of the Hungarian National Assembly also demonstrated their solidarity with the global stance against the COVID-19 pandemic by contributing to the Solidarity Response Fund, the partnership between the WHO, the United Nations Foundation and the Swiss Philanthropy Fund. Regardless of their party affiliation every single member of the Hungarian National Assembly supported the idea of donating 50% of their 2020 annual IPU membership fee to the Solidarity Response Fund.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated tangibly and more clearly than ever the elementary importance of sustainability. Because if a society functions in a sustainable way, it will be more resilient to crises as well. Many look on sustainability as some kind of a luxury commodity, which you have to be able to afford once you have satisfied your basic needs. In fact, it is quite the opposite: the fundamentals of our existence depend on ecological sustainability and demographic stability, while our enduring prosperity depends on our investments into knowledge and innovation. This is why it is in our elementary interest to implement the – Sustainable Development – Goals of the United Nation's *Agenda 2030* program.

Hungary is dedicated to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. We are committed at the national level and also with a view to strengthening international

cooperation. Hungary has a detailed national sustainable development strategy in place since 2013, the implementation of which is monitored by a number of institutions. The Hungarian National Assembly – uniquely among the parliaments of the world – operates its own advisory and conciliation institution for sustainable development: the National Sustainable Development Council. Every two years, the Council prepares a detailed analysis of the sustainability situation in the country, the status of the implementation of sustainable development goals.

During the COVID-19 pandemic we did not suspend any of the measures introduced to promote sustainable development. We have adapted the conditions of the childbirth incentive loan, launched as a part of our family support program so that families planning to have children could have access to it during the period of restricted movement; among the available bank loan products this was the only one where we observed an increase in disbursement during the pandemic. The government announced its Climate and Nature Protection Action Plan before the outbreak of the pandemic, and it was in the midst of the emergency that we adopted the law that would guarantee the climate neutrality of Hungary by 2050. A comprehensive and detailed ecosystem inventory of our country will be ready by the end of the year, which will provide information for us about the natural assets on every square meter of our country along with their size and status, that is the amount of ecosystem services the area is able to provide. By monitoring the indicators of this inventory year to year we will be able to see, if our socio-economic development is evolving in a way that preserves natural assets, to see if this development is sustainable or not.

When rebooting the economy after the lockdown many Hungarian research institutes and think tanks suggested that the economic recovery assistance of the government should be targeted on areas related to sustainability, on development and innovation there. During the pandemic, the Hungarian administration initially focused on protecting jobs impacted by the curfew, but the attention in Hungary has also gradually shifted to sustainable projects. Hungary successfully issued green bonds on the international monetary markets to finance these projects, oversubscription was more than five-fold. The economic incentive programs of other governments supportive of sustainability are encouraging and a food for thought for us.

Consequently, no pandemic can be used as an excuse to defer steps needed to secure sustainability. Moreover, the sustainable use of the environment could be a guarantee in reducing the risk of pandemics caused by animal borne viruses.

Therefore, the pandemic is a kind of an indicator of our unsustainable practices, warning us that we still have a very long way to go in achieving our sustainable development goals. Just like when curbing the pandemic, this will also require strong nations as well as strong multilateral cooperation. The austere objectives of international treaties and programs aimed at sustainable development will only become reality if there are those who will implement these goals locally, if the national norms, regulations and incentives are in place for this.

We believe that sustainable development is the way forward, which in accordance with the UN Decade of Action will ensure peace and prosperity for all the inhabitants of the planet. Therefore, we have to join our efforts to ensure the supply of essential goods globally, to protect the environment, democracy and human rights and to promote peace, so that through these we can contribute to the creation of a better world based on solidarity.