

STATEMENT

in contribution to the

UNECE REGIONAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Geneva, 2019

London, 10th April 2019

This is a statement on behalf of the delegates and participants of the side event **'Economic Growth vs Environmental Sustainability'**, organised by the European Environmental Bureau, based on the conclusion of our discussions and the consensus that was found and unanimously agreed upon:

The nature of the contributions and discourse during the plenary sessions as well as the round table events saw an illogical and undue focus on 'economic growth'. The wording of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8), in particular the term 'growth', evidently distracts from the inherently sustainable context behind SDG 8 and consequently becomes an obstacle to fruitful conversations on sustainability. Moreover, the goal of 'economic growth' itself, is problematic and needs to be reconsidered and revised for the following reasons:

1. **'Growth' in itself is not a goal** but a strategy; a strategy without a defined goal - growth to what end?
2. The pursuit of growth as measured in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a purely financial success indicator, consigns ethical and sustainability considerations, like human dignity, social justice or the environment, to competing interests of lesser value. Therefore, the pursuit of growth in GDP will always be **in direct conflict with other Sustainable Development Goals**.
3. **GDP, the measure of economic growth, is a meaningless success indicator**. It does not tell us anything about our wellbeing, health, about social cohesion or the state of the environment. On the contrary, people being unhealthy, for example, currently has an overall positive effect on GDP, as revenue from associated healthcare contributes to its growth. But even as a financial success indicator it fails for the vast majority of people. This is exemplified by the disconnect between growth in real GDP per capita and almost stagnant real median income.
4. The **SDGs are supposed to be universally applicable** to all member states and it is becoming increasingly questionable, if the most developed countries should indeed pursue more economic growth in the face of climate change. This is

underlined by the fact that already policy makers are using the term *growth* only with support of adjectives like *green* and/or *inclusive*.

5. **'Economic Growth' is not the right strategy** for the problems the world is facing today. Growth is a strategy that was employed to address scarcity - the most developed countries, however, have achieved a state of abundance. The problems we face today require a new economic strategy, one that preserves this abundance, distributes it more equally and is environmentally sustainable.
6. As long as 'economic growth' remains the very goal of economic activity, material growth, the use of earth's resources, material output and consumption, will also grow. **The laws of physics don't allow for this growth strategy to be pursued indefinitely - the time to accept this fact, is now.**

This is not to say that in the future economic growth, growth in GDP, is no longer possible or wanted, but that it mustn't be the very goal we set for our economy and by which we measure economic progress by.

For the above reasons **we request that the wording of Sustainable Development Goal 8 will be reconsidered and altered** to reflect the circumstances and knowledge of our time and the urgency of avoiding the impending ecological and climate catastrophe.

The signatories of this statement are listed in the enclosed document.

Thank you for taking this statement into consideration. We would expect this to be included in the Director General's summary and report to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York and for members to be given the opportunity to reflect on these points and to consider a change to the definition of Sustainable Development Goal 8.

Yours Sincerely,

The attendees of the side event *Economic Growth vs Environmental Sustainability*

List of attendees of the side event 'Economic Growth vs Environmental Sustainability' supporting the enclosed statement:

| Name | Organisation |
|-----------------------|---|
| Prof. Dr. Brent Bleys | Ghent University, Department of Economics |
| Antje v Dewitz, CEO | VAUDE |
| Christian Felber | Author and Founder of the Economy for the Common Good |
| Jan Mayrhofer | European Youth Forum |
| Nick Meynen | European Environmental Bureau |
| Sophia Fei Ya Chen | UN MGCY Engineers Without Borders Canada |
| Giulio Borsa | International Organization for Least Developed Countries |
| Tanja Gohlert | Global Call to Action against Poverty |
| Linda Loreen Loose | HNE University of Sustainable development |
| Daniela von Pfuhsheim | ECG Germany |
| Peter Loewi | UN MGCY |
| Raphael Podselver | ProVeg International |
| Ronica Chopra | Open School of Sustainable Development |
| Bernhard Zlanabitznig | EU Umweltbüro |
| Matt Mayer | Economy for the Common Good |
| Cedric Chambrillon | UNMGCY, Erasmus University Rotterdam |
| Lukas Kirn | DPSG St Willibald, TU München |
| Rebecca Freitag | Deutscher Bundesjugendring/ German National Youth Council |
| Simon Wahl | UN Environment |
| Theresa Frank | Global Survey/ Schlange & Co. GmbH |

All signatories consent with the statement personally and not necessarily on behalf of the organisation or company they represent.