

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. MIROSLAV LAJČÁK,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC,
AT THE CONFERENCE ON THE GLOBAL PACT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

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Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

I am very happy to be here – at the Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment.

So...here we are....one year after this Center held a conference to talk about the prospect of a Global Pact.

For the year in between, I had the honour of serving as the President of the United Nations General Assembly.

As of eight days ago, I am back to my capacity of Foreign Minister of Slovakia.

I still, however, want to lend the perspective I gained, as General Assembly President, to our discussion today. Simply because I think the Assembly will be crucial - not only with regard to the Global Pact but also in the larger fight against climate change.

And so, I would like to make three main points.

First, I will state the obvious.

Which is that we need to act urgently. Things cannot continue as they are going. The facts and figures are very clear. The way we are living has led to massive ecological and environmental shifts. The climate around us is changing.

Just this year, millions of people, not too far from here, suffered the effects of devastating hurricanes. (I know our thoughts are with those killed or affected by Hurricane Florence.) Also, many African countries have suffered their worst droughts in decades.

Moreover, 2017 was one of the three hottest years on record. And current trends of Greenhouse House Emissions say that we will feel further warming.

Meanwhile, sea levels are rising. The ocean is reclaiming territory. And it is becoming more and more polluted... To the extent that we are now on the verge of an entire eco-system collapse.

So, this is a lot of doom and gloom.

The good news, however, is that we are catching on.

Last year, at the annual high-level General Debate at the United Nations, climate change and Sustainable Development dominated the conversation. This shows the increasing priority attached to these issues by world leaders.

Also, more and more of our international pacts and agreements reflect the need to take action for our planet. Obviously, I am thinking primarily of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement. As well as, hopefully, the Global Pact.

And I want to focus on this Pact, for my second point.

As you all know, last September, President Macron put the Pact on table of the international community.

And he made a very good case. He explained how it could bring many of our existing international instruments together – and create more coherence. And he told us that it could be the push we need, to pick up the pace on implementation of the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Over the past year, we have taken steps to make this Pact a reality.

The delegation of France introduced a new resolution to the General Assembly. And, in doing so, it formally launched the international process to develop the Global Pact.

Very soon afterwards, I appointed two co-chairs, to lead this process: Ambassador Francisco António Duarte Lopes, of Portugal, and Ambassador Amal Mudallali, of Lebanon.

And then, something called the “Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group” began. This is an expert-level group of Member States.

Its first session was held this month, from the 5th to the 7th of September. It focused mainly on organization matters. And, some important decisions were reached.

The Group decided to hold its first *substantive* session in the new year. This will take place from the 14th to the 18th of January, in Nairobi, Kenya. Dates for two additional sessions were agreed for March and May 2019.

But the most immediate step will come this November, when the UN Secretary-General is due to release his report. It will identify the gaps in international environmental law. And it will make recommendations on how we can better implement legal instruments for the environment. Overall, this report will lay the groundwork, for the process ahead.

And, with that, let me turn to my final point, on what the future looks like.

The Working Group has one main task. And that is to make recommendations to the UN General Assembly. One of them might be a proposal to convene an intergovernmental conference, with the aim of adopting a Global Pact.

So, that is a rough outline, of the road ahead. But whether we get to our destination depends, I believe, on dialogue and diplomacy. Because this is not, just, a technical process. Rather, it is an exercise of multilateral cooperation – from which we *all* stand to gain.

We have already achieved a lot. We successfully adopted the Sustainable Development Goals. And the ratifications of the Paris Agreement continue to rise (on that note, I want to welcome the recent ratification by Liberia).

But the challenges are getting even more daunting.

So, it is not about starting from scratch. We already have all the tools we need. What this process – and this Pact - can do is allow us to *use* them better.

But that will only happen if we make it inclusive. Governments must lead on climate change. They cannot, however, go it alone.

And it will only happen through real interaction, real listening and real dialogue.

So, I will end here.

I want to briefly thank Professor Jeffrey Sachs. I know he's a major force on the Columbia campus! During my presidency, he was also a valued member of my team of External Advisers.

Jeff, I am grateful to you for your insightful....and frank advice, over the past year.

And I am grateful to *all* of you for listening to me.

I know I have, to a certain extent, been preaching to the choir today.

If you are here, you are likely already passionate and ready to act, for the planet.

But, the more the choir practices, the more it is heard. And the more familiar its songs become, to those who are listening from outside.

So, let's continue to raise our voices – and raise the warning flags - about climate change. And let's use diplomacy and dialogue to drive us to a Global Pact.

Thank you all again.