ALIGNING IRAN’S DEVELOPMENT 2026 VISION WITH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Iran 2026 Vision Conference

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• This important symposium today provides me with an opportunity to convey a very simple message.
• The message is to request public planners and financial decision-makers in the Islamic Republic of Iran to review Iran’s 2026 Perspective Plan goals from the perspective of sustainable growth and development.
• In September this year, in New York, the countries of the world will gather at the UN General Assembly. We anticipate that they will adopt a bold, new and integrated agenda for sustainable development.
• And, with this agenda, we will also adopt an ambitious set of Sustainable Development Goals (or SDGs).
• These SDGs will take over from where the Millennium Development Goals stop.
• The Millennium Development Goals – which end this year – were, in many ways, about tackling development problems – especially poverty – with:
  o improved cooperation,
  o national resources and
  o official development assistance.
• But the new SDGs – which will come into force this year – will have a much larger and more diversified aim. They are about the way we live. Behave. Invest. Do business. The way we produce and consume.
• They are about how to make economies grow sustainably. And how to mobilize and allocate resources. Their purpose is to deliver growth which is both:
  o inclusive enough to take care of current generations, and
  o sustainable enough to not compromise the prospects for future generations.
• Official negotiations over the SDGs started last month among UN member states in the General Assembly. As I have said, we anticipate agreement by September.
• Now, what will Iran’s role in this process be?
• Iran is an important founder Member State of the United Nations.
• I believe that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran can demonstrate leadership – among the community of nations – by seeking – from early – to align elements of Iran’s strategic 2026 Perspective Plan with the new SDG goals and methods.
• In doing so, Iran can also demonstrate that it is determined to move beyond a strongly pro-economic-growth focus towards a more sustainable-economic-growth approach.
• The present timing is also appropriate given that Iran is now one year away from beginning the implementation of its new 6th Five-Year Development Plan – a mechanism which contributes to the goals of the 2026 Perspective Plan.

Realignment

What would such a realignment look like?

Well, let me first explain what I understand to be the underpinnings of the current economic growth model.

Iran’s current 20-year Perspective Plan was designed in 2005. Its trustee is the Expediency Council.

• It has a pro-economic-growth approach which aims to achieve a number of social and economic objectives.
• At the same time, the 2026 Perspective Plan provides the overall framework for the medium-term planning system in Iran which currently takes the form of the 5th Five-Year National Development Plan.

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1 It focuses on the following objectives:
1. Increased economic growth.
2. Enabling high investment and savings from energy sources (such as oil, gas, and water).
3. Regional security initiatives (designed to strengthen Iran’s role in region and make it a “primary” power).
4. Increased trade – in all sectors, and also especially through various tourism possibilities.
5. Knowledge and technology development.
6. Social development (including health and education) to strengthen human resources.
• That Plan sets a target of 8% GDP growth per year.
• This is a high rate, which requires a 12% growth in investment each year.
• The 5th Five-Year Plan also aims to reduce unemployment to 7%...
• …and income inequality – as measured by the Gini coefficient – to 0.3.
• Achievement of these rates would certainly have enabled Iran to get close to the 2026 Perspective Plan objectives.

• However, as we know, there have been many constraints to the implementation of this plan.
  ✓ **Sanctions** and structural challenges have had a negative impact.
  ✓ **Unemployment** remains high.
  ✓ **GDP growth** since 2005 has remained lower than expected per annum.
  ✓ And continued **inflation** adversely affects inequality and standards of living.

**The SDGs**

• I would now like to use the opportunity of sharing ideas with you to introduce another compelling set of objectives – which are also global objectives.²
• These are the Sustainable Development Goals.
• The trustee for the Sustainable Development Goals is the **United Nations**, and – ultimately – all the worlds’ governments together.
• The SDGs have been mapped out with a great deal of painstaking care.
• At the UN Headquarters in New York, representatives of Iran were also prominently involved in this process.
• The SDGs’ objective is to deliver **sustainable** development.

**So, what is the advantage to Iran of aligning its 2026 Perspective Plan with the new SDGs?**

• Naturally, there are some commonalities between the 2026 Perspective Plan and the SDGs.

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² But I would first like to provide a little background, if I may. The existing Millennium Development Goals were established in 2000. They were expected to be achieved by 2015. There were 8 goals and 49 indicators. Iran seems well on track to attaining 5 of these 8 goals. The Sustainable Development Goals – or SDGs – are, however, more ambitious. As I have said, the new SDGs under consideration by the UN General Assembly currently contain 17 goals and 169 indicators. Our vision is getting wider and more diverse. Global public goods, in a more complex age, require such a broader vision.
• But there is a reason why Iran should consider further alignment of its 2026 Perspective Plan with the SDGs.
• Simply put, global circumstances have changed.
• The “Economic-Growth-Only” model – which has been the conventional planning workhorse for many years – is – on its own – no longer feasible.
• It creates too many social and environmental challenges – which eventually become more complex and more costly to address.
• For example, science tells us that Iran faces a hotter, drier future. This will result in challenges – in the future – in areas such as food security – and the possibility of migration which is induced by a combination of resource management and climate change challenges.
• Other, earlier, speakers have referred to the fact that Iran has adopted an economic growth model which emphasizes the utilization of non-renewable as opposed to renewable resource.
• Speakers referred to water and to the water stress situation. I have travelled – during my two years working in Iran – to many zones of this water stress. The Hamouns. The Zayanderud. Lake Urmia. The declining water table in Mashhad. The increased salinity of the water table around Shiraz.
• There was solutions to be found – as other speakers have also said – in more effective water pricing. Better protection of underground water. More efficient use of water. Greater involvement of citizens in decisions made regarding the water in their communities.
• Speakers referred to energy efficiency. Iran, while accounting for only one person in 70 living on our planet, produces the 9th largest volume of greenhouse gases. This may reflect an industrial development pattern that is not sustainable.
• We also face sustainability challenges in terms of desertification. Air pollution. Water pollution.

• We must therefore address and mitigate the onset of these – and similar – challenges if we are to sustain and ensure a better future for our children.

• Therefore, now that the draft SDGs have been formally published, Iran’s strategic planners – including the Expediency Council – could consider the 17 SDGs for a longer-term-planning horizon.
• The Expediency Council could choose to adopt all 17 SDGs (3 of which relate directly to climate change and the environment) in its own Perspective Plan.
• Or it could choose to adopt only those which are considered directly relevant to Iran’s national context.
• And, for each SDG goal adopted, it could also adopt at least 2 of the multiple indicators.

• Strategic planners could then allow this broad decision-making orientation to feed into the ongoing preparation of the forthcoming 6th Five-Year National Development Plan – so as to ensure integration between the long-term and medium-term plans.

• Strategic planners could also consider the following methods to orient the 2026 Perspective Plan towards a more sustainable development growth approach.
  ✓ More public-private-community partnerships.
  ✓ More local resource mobilisation.
  ✓ More local involvement in resource allocation decisions.
  ✓ Results-Based-Management capacity development at all planning levels.
  ✓ Combining social protection, decent work and productivity increases at local levels.
  ✓ Finally, developing and implementing a National SDG Action Plan.

**Role of the United Nations**

✓ In all this the UN is here – on the ground in Tehran – and can offer support.

✓ UNDP can help in the following areas:
  ▪ Results-Based-Management planning
  ▪ Integrated management capacity development
  ▪ Environmental assessments
  ▪ Natural resources development
  ▪ Land and water management, and
  ▪ Climate change mitigation and adaptation.

✓ UNDP is especially well positioned to support sustainable growth planning processes – and the idea of a National SDG Action Plan.

✓ Other UN agencies can help in other areas, such as:
  ▪ Water management analysis.
  ▪ Migration pattern analysis.
  ▪ Food security, food production and food consumption.
  ▪ Community-based tourism development.
  ▪ Women’s economic empowerment – especially for female-headed households.
  ▪ And much more.
  ▪ These are all relevant to delivering sustainable development.
And the SDGs – as I believe we will come to see – are essential to attain if we are to live sustainably on our planet.

Including here in Iran.