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Dutch businesses endorse sustainability in COVID-19 recovery

A broad coalition of Dutch companies pledges support to take sustainability as the cornerstone in the COVID-19 recovery plans

The COVID-19 pandemic is unparalleled in recent history. As with all Dutch businesses, we are committed to doing everything we can to support our healthcare system and mitigate the economic and social impacts. We are grateful for the leadership of the Dutch government and thank everyone who has been in the frontlines of this challenge. We will continue to take our responsibility, as we have done ever since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis. Over the past weeks, Dutch businesses and governments have formed partnerships to innovate quickly and jointly fight the COVID-19 pandemic. We have ramped up the production of essential medical supplies within our borders and found new ways to distribute them. These actions inspire hope for addressing future challenges where public-private partnerships are key.

The COVID-19 crisis hits our society during its transition to a more sustainability-driven and inclusive economy. It is important not to lose sight of this challenge, the risks associated with climate change and the loss of biodiversity. If we act now, we will have the opportunity to strengthen our economy while at the same time alleviate adverse impacts on our environment, society, people's well-being and business operations. Dutch enterprises are fully committed to continue embedding sustainability as a leading principle in their business models. We will keep reporting our performance annually in an integrated and transparent way. We are committed to ensuring that our contribution to act against climate change will be grounded in science-based ambitions and roadmaps.

We pledge our support to take sustainability as a cornerstone in COVID-19 recovery measures, at both national and European Union (EU) level. A focus on social responsibility and climate action through the lens of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will reinforce economies and also offers a north star for our global society. We must not forget that the COVID-19 pandemic has a massive impact on developing countries. Building supply chains with inclusiveness and sustainability embedded will help to create stable and more resilient economies on both sides. A focus on sustainability now, adopting the UN SDGs as a guiding compass to define and measure our efforts, will not only mitigate climate risks but also brings with it the opportunity to position our economy for future sustainability-driven growth and a more inclusive society. Given the size of the required recovery investments and the shortening time until our Paris commitments, we should take full advantage of this opportunity.

As a broad coalition of Dutch businesses, we endorse a strong focus on sustainability and ask the Dutch government to consider the following points:

1. Endorse the EU Green Deal as one of the cornerstones of the EU Recovery Plan. The EU Green Deal combined with a strong strategy for investments, global trade and diplomacy has the potential to accelerate sustainability transitions in global value chains. Subsequently, this will increase EU GDP, improve health standards and create millions of decent jobs. Taking into account the global level playing field, we support

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the ambitions of the EU to become climate neutral by 2050 at the latest. We call upon the Dutch government to work together with all EU heads of state and government to endorse the central position of the EU Green Deal within the EU Recovery Plan.

2. Build the COVID-19 recovery plan around an investment schedule that firmly puts our Dutch economy on the path of realizing the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement. Dutch companies are front-runners in the field of sustainability. By investing in selected sustainability competencies, innovations, and knowledge, we can build competitive advantages. We have to drive innovation and thereby further develop our Dutch solutions for global challenges. Where short-term economic support provided by governments and financial institutions to companies impacted by the pandemic has been essential, investments in sustainable solutions in the medium-term are necessary for our economy's long-term earnings model. Specifically, we would strongly encourage using the EU Recovery Funds for substantial investments in the fields of energy transition infrastructure, circular economy models, capability development, cleaner mobility solutions (including clean fuels), nature-based solutions, ecosystem restoration and schemes to drive low carbon product demand. Investments following from the EU Green Deal (e.g. the EU Sustainable Europe Investment Plan and Just Transition Fund), supported by the EU Sustainable Finance Strategy amongst other actions plans, have the potential to bring about a multiplier effect in mobilizing the required public and private capital.

3. Continue to provide long-term certainty regarding the Dutch climate agreement and measurable commitments. The executing power of businesses can only be effective within clear policy frameworks from governments. We have to ensure our Dutch climate agreement stands firm and its execution is accelerated using the Green Recovery funds wisely. At the same time, we must see to proper alignment with the EU targets for 2030 and 2050. When done right, these clear objectives and roadmaps provide companies with the confidence to invest in green, net zero-emission solutions for our future needs. We encourage aligning the EU Emission Trading System (ETS) with the European climate ambitions while ensuring a level playing field with the rest of the world.

To further embed sustainability in our economy, we would welcome an independent Dutch study on how we can "Make markets fit for SDG purpose". This study should focus on how governmental instruments could strengthen market conditions for the business sector, enabling the sector to maximize its contribution to the SDG agenda.

We look forward to continuing our collaborative work with the Dutch and EU governments, to further embed sustainability using the full SDG agenda as a mainspring of our economies. Together, we can make this possible.