

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement

by

Ms. Olga Algayerova

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

**IAEA Scientific Forum 2020
22 September 2020 (remote participation)**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is not difficult to convince anyone that we are going through extraordinary times. The planet has reached a tipping point and the emergency lights are flashing – I used to say warning lights, but I want to insist that we are in an emergency.

The current pandemic has taken its toll– we have now passed the grim milestone of 1 million deaths.

But there are so many other disasters that have visited us in quick succession:

Forest fires have engulfed all continents, including the coldest and wettest places, taking with them a toll of more than 1 billion animals.

Some of the worst floods and droughts ever recorded have been seen in many countries.

The human, environmental, social, and economic prices we are paying are unprecedented. We could have limited the impacts had we taken earlier warnings more seriously.

Planetary temperatures are rising fast as the climate changes and are at the root of these disasters. We are already at 1°C above +pre-industrial temperatures. There is no doubt and there should be no debate.

The UN has announced a Decade of Action from 2020-2030 to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. But what we are doing is not working. Current modes of thinking and working will not get us there.

Energy is at the heart of sustainable development. It cannot be taken in isolation but is essential for quality of life.

The energy system is a significant contributor to emissions of carbon dioxide and methane. Efforts to green the energy system have

brought only modest gains. Over 80 per cent of the global fuel mix is still fossil!

Renewables and energy efficiency are central to the future energy system. Electricity and transport are decarbonizing but industry and other sectors of society are becoming more fossil dependent. There is a huge call on critical raw materials required for the future energy system.

We are not on track for 2°C let alone 1.5°C. Even the agreed goals may not be enough to reverse the planetary meltdown we are all witnessing – in the present trajectory we are heading for a 4°C increase!

We need to deploy every technology and to pursue every approach to reverse the trend. We must recognize that every country has its own endowment of natural resources and its own cultural, legislative, and regulatory heritage and each country will pursue its own pathway to the 2030 Agenda.

What is clear based on our work at UNECE is that we will not achieve our objectives collectively if nuclear energy is excluded.

Nuclear energy can be a critical component of a decarbonized energy system:

if the industry addresses its costs – efforts on small modular reactors are a good example,

if it addresses the human and institutional factors that caused or exacerbated the well-known incidents and accidents, and

if it addresses waste disposal.

The industry also needs to improve its communications.

Many countries include nuclear energy as part of their climate change strategy. In Central Asia and the Middle East, countries have embarked on new nuclear power programmes as they perceive nuclear energy as an important and essential option for decarbonization.

Nuclear energy is relevant to the collective outcomes for all countries. The expansion of options such as small modular reactors and advanced technology that uses thorium and safe designs that produce less waste should be attractive to many countries.

I head the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. We are a regional commission of 56 member States from the pan-European region. We are a technical organization that develops standards, norms and guidelines in several fields pertaining to sustainable development, including energy, transport, trade, environment, and others. Our innovative products and tools often are adopted globally.

UNECE has an integrated and holistic energy programme and our energy standards are deployed globally. I should note that as an organization, we are agnostic on energy policy and energy technology, out of respect for the unique pathways of countries. The portfolio of available options clearly includes nuclear energy.

An example of our global energy standards can be found in our United Nations Framework Classification for Resources – UNFC for short. The European Union, African Union, the Russian Federation, the CIS region and other major countries like China, India and Mexico have adopted UNFC or are in the process of doing so. They are also working with us to develop a derivative United Nations Resource Management System or UNRMS as we are calling it.

UNRMS will help countries optimize their resource endowments and align their policies and investments with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. Both UNFC and UNRMS are integrated with UNECE’s practices on environmental management, methane management and energy efficiency.

We have built a collaborative platform on energy. Participants come not only from over 85 countries worldwide, but also from key UN agencies including IAEA, our sister regional commissions, international organizations, industry, academia, and civil society. We

work closely with international organizations such as the IEA, the Nuclear Energy Agency and the World Nuclear Association.

Having a sustainable and integrated approach to energy system management is not just a fancy idea. It is an imperative for the future. It addresses the food-water-energy nexus, is holistic, and is tuned to a needed balance with nature. At UNECE, we have organized our work into several nexus areas, including one the sustainable use of natural resources including energy sources. We have projects on carbon neutrality and pathways to sustainable energy with integrated and indivisible management of energy at the core.

This is a time of crisis. A message that I would look for coming out of this Scientific Forum 2020 is “Emergency acceleration of decarbonization”, with integration of all technologies on the path to a sustainable energy future. We must act as a networked platform of key principals who can serve as an emergency control centre for deep decarbonization. The necessary policy, technological, commercial, financial and social communication imperatives need to be agreed as a matter of urgency.

UNECE stands ready to work with IAEA and other energy partners in this regard.

I wish the Scientific Forum 2020 all success. Thank you for your attention.