



Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Sustainable Energy

Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane

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Item 3 of the agenda

Opening remarks

Opening remarks by Mr. Raymond Pilcher

Chair, UNECE Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane

Good morning. I want to welcome the newly elected members of the bureau of the Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane and thank those that have agreed to continue to serve. Those members returning have worked hard over the last two years, and made it one of the most productive periods of our organization's efforts thus far. I also want to thank you very much for the honor of serving as Chair of this group, I will work diligently to support the efforts of the group, and provide my help to ensure delivery of the work products as required by our work plan over the next two years. The Committee on Sustainable Energy met in late September of this year and have granted our request for an extension of our mandate through the end of 2019. This is tacit recognition of the work that we have done and an encouragement for the work that we have yet to do.

I want to extend a warm welcome to the members of the Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane and to our colleagues from the Global Methane Initiative. This is the 12th meeting of the GoE and the 25th meeting of the Coal Subcommittee of GMI. We have met jointly in Geneva several times over the past several years and each time the meetings have been fruitful. We are fortunate to hold our joint meeting in Geneva surrounded by a beautiful and pristine alpine setting, at the Palais des Nations, which stands as a tribute to those who have come together in the past to solve



some of the most difficult problems that have faced humankind. Although on the face of it, we are gathered to have one of now, 37 meetings that our groups have held to discuss how we will tackle emissions of methane from coal mines. Clearly from our prior work we have demonstrated that we understand that abating methane emissions, no matter the source, is critical to the environmental health of our planet. The Pew trust found by polling 40 nations in April 2015, that the majority of the citizens in the nations polled believe that climate change is a serious problem. At that time, the citizens of the United States and China were less concerned than those that inhabit Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. A Gallup poll published in May of 2017, showed that Americans were more concerned than they were two years prior, in 2015, when a poll at that time showed that 57% believed that climate change was human caused—now, in 2017, 68% believe that our species is driving climate change. Moreover, after a particularly harsh Atlantic hurricane season, a substantial majority of Americans blamed climate change for the number and intensity of the storms. Here, in Europe, 74% of those polled see climate change as a “very serious” problem, 93% see it as merely “serious”. Europeans widely believe that climate change can be reduced by switching to clean energy. With those statistics in mind, we were right to have participated in those past meetings and we should not let this meeting pass without considering what we can do to help stem the causes of climate change. We all know that methane is a powerful greenhouse gas, and yesterday we learned that even though that in some parts of the world coal mines are closing at a relatively rapid pace, emissions from those mines will continue largely unabated, unless we help. While focused on the climate altering emissions of methane from coal mines, we cannot forget that on

25 July 2011 the Economic and Social Council of the UN passed a resolution that “ Social Council, taking note a decision, A (64) of the Economic Commission for Europe and welcoming the endorsement by the Commission, of the Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Drainage and Use in Coal Mines, decided to invite States Members of the United Nations, international organizations, and the regional commissions to consider the possibility of taking



appropriate measures to ensure the application of the Best Practice Guidance in countries worldwide.

Implementation of these best practices can help protect those miners that continued to work underground, some of whom daily face danger that could easily take their lives and destroy the coal mine that supports their family and surrounding community. We must continue our outreach and dissemination of the principles contained in that document, as we prepare to work on another document dedicated to a principles-based guidance on sustainable practices for coal mine closure.

In that regard, we are at the end of a very active two year period that will see the completion of the most ambitious work plan that the group of experts has undertaken. I am grateful to the members of the Group of Experts who volunteered their time to help draft and edit the second edition of the Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Drainage and Use in Coal Mines, as well as those who travelled to various workshops to deliver well received presentations in India, Poland, Kazakhstan and China to participate in workshops. I congratulate the group on the successful completion of the 2016-2017 work plan. The Group of Experts appreciates the extrabudgetary funding from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) that contributed to making the work possible. The combination of the funding and the enthusiastic volunteers from our membership made the past two years and unequalled success. A work plan for an extrabudgetary project funded by USEPA for the upcoming 2018-2019 period has been approved as a part of our mandate, and we are appreciative of the continued support. This work plan, which we will discuss over the next few days is even more ambitious than the one we have just completed and its successful completion will continue to be dependent upon the individual and collective efforts and expertise of the Group and the newly opened International Centres of Excellence. I am happy to say that we have additional help, as we have successfully inaugurated



two International Centers of Excellence, the first in Poland was inaugurated 8 June 2017, and just a month ago, the second, located in China was inaugurated on 23 September 2017.

These International Centres of Excellence will be focal points from which new initiatives and trainings can be coordinated to support our overall mission. The group of experts has taken on broader context as the Group of Experts works with other of the Committee on Sustainable Energy's expert groups to develop approaches to cross-cutting issues impinging on sustainable energy development. We are part of the UN, and as such we must be ever-mindful that our work should contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN. In pursuit of finding ways to mitigate climate change, provide affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure, we will encounter resistance. Nevertheless, we may be able to help achieve these goals though better understanding the role that increasing the effective capture and use of methane throughout the coal mining lifecycle will play in modernizing the energy sector in coal mining areas of the globe.. . I am pleased with our progress thus far, but I cannot help but feel that we are just beginning to do our best work.