

## **Opening Comments: Chair of Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane Raymond Pilcher**

Representatives of the governments of the member states of the UNECE, members of Secretariat, delegates, experts, and the Co-Chairs and of the Global Methane Initiative Coal Subcommittee and its Project Network members, it is an honor and pleasure to welcome all of you to the Palais des Nations and for me to Chair this, the 13<sup>th</sup> session of the Group of Experts on CMM. Our expert group is delighted to hold this meeting in conjunction with Global Methane Initiative meeting. As I do every time I open this meeting, and look around the room, I am awe-struck by the level expertise and experience that these two organizations offer and the potential impact that we may have on the coal industry as it endeavors to take a sustainable path forward. We represent a broad range in background from technical professionals, business leaders, policy experts and government officials; all of whom possess a working knowledge of some aspect of coal mining and possess a qualified appreciation of the costs and benefits of managing gas that is at once a hazard to the miner, an agent of climate change and an undervalued source of energy. Of course, we each have an individual points of view shaped by the experience of our life, we may be engaged in challenges of developing and constructing energy production projects that incorporates the drainage of methane from boreholes, or captures it from ventilation systems, or we may be engaged in analyzing and formulating policies that encourage the use of methane that would otherwise be liberated during mining. Others of our membership are engaged in forecasting the magnitude of the volume of methane that is released and assessing the costs on the global environment. None of us like to count the social costs of losing lives when coal mining communities suffer the aftermath of needless explosions—yet communities located in coal mining countries throughout the world have had to engage in this calculus year after year. Thus far, in 2018, there have been methane and coal dust explosions at coal mines in various parts of the world, 16 died in Pakistan, five in China, four in Georgia, and one in the United States, and certainly there are other accidents of which I am unaware, but the signal is clear-- we have more work to do. These explosions are not inevitable—they are preventable.

As most of you know, we are beginning the second year of an extrabudgetary project funded by the USEPA which includes preparing and delivering workshops and seminars to various coal mining countries, this year we have arranged and conducted these meetings in Poland, Colombia, Canada and Kazakhstan. We have witnessed the further development of the services offered by the centers of excellence in China and Poland, and now other countries are considering establishing centers that serve their coal mining communities. Our group of experts, in partnership with colleagues in GMI have developed a risk assessment tool and a guidance for training in its use with our colleagues at the International Center of Excellence in Taiyuan China. The tool will be readied for release through the UN in the upcoming year. We are actively engaged in drafting a best practices document on the capture and use of abandoned mine methane, but we need additional help in drafting this important document; we will discuss this topic tomorrow. We are yet to determine how we will produce a standard training module for best practices for capture and use of methane throughout the coal mine lifecycle, but this critical product that we must address soon, in order to ensure its delivery. Later today we will discuss how we may respond to requests for conducting workshops and seminars in other member countries during the upcoming year; tomorrow we will discuss the remaining tasks for which we have committed to produce deliverables in 2019. In addition, tomorrow we will have two interesting panel discussions:

One related to Women Diversity and Inclusion in Extractive Industries, based on recent research conducted by the Women's Human Rights Program, which is an important topic and speaks to one of the key sustainable development goals

And a second panel related to transition of energy infrastructure which will include panelists from several organizations that have direct experience in developing and conducting programs which are providing platforms and framework for the transformation of coal mining areas into sustainable systems in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We start this day mindful of actions that we must take to fulfill our mandate from the Committee on Sustainable energy, and to fulfill our obligations under the workplan that we adopted for 2018 and 2019. I am certain that you recognize that we must all contribute if we are to satisfy our obligations. There are two things that make achievement of these goal possible, one is the outside funding which we are fortunate to receive, and the other is the talent and hard work that must be provided by our membership. The membership helps us field experts to provide technical information to the member states that request it, and it guides this organization. As our obligations have expanded, we find that the demands on the members of the Group of Experts to donate their time increasing. As you are aware, planning and guidance of the group is provided by the Bureau, which acts to ensure that we consider important issues impacting our ability to perform and helps plan the mode of delivery for our work products. We have a large and diverse bureau, but we struggle to have meetings that involve all our bureau members and capture the benefit from the broad range of expertise that could be provided. This is critical, and the Secretariat and I recognize that there are barriers that must be overcome to increase participation. Because bureau members are spread across the globe and time zones and speak a variety of languages, we are challenged to conduct our meetings with more robust participation; nevertheless, we must make our meetings more inclusive. We are open to adjusting the timing of the meeting and exploring alternate ways for us to communicate, including online, real-time written communication and spoken discussion that can be translated into several languages during the meeting. To encourage a more responsive bureau membership I am proposing that we develop a terms of reference that lays out the responsibilities of bureau members and guidance for the bureau meetings and the necessary follow-up. Likewise, it is imperative that we have broader participation from our membership. None of the workshops or seminars that are conducted are possible without the contributions from our experts. Over the last year we have relied upon many of the same experts to participate in these events. The needs of the countries requesting

workshops and seminars are diverse and therefore the expertise that is provided must match. I ask that all of you consider how you will participate in upcoming events—you are needed!

Finally, I am convinced that we are only limited by our imagination as we consider our path forward, and based on what on what I have observed regarding the creativity and diligence with which members of our organization pursues its work, the future of contribution to our member states is without limits.

Thank you, I look forward to a productive meeting and your crucial and vigorous participation.