

**Speech of the Executive Secretary**  
**at the Opening of the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on Sustainable Energy.**

*26 September 2017*

Your Excellences, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you to this 26<sup>th</sup> session of the UNECE Committee on Sustainable Energy. As you may know I took up my role as Executive Secretary of UNECE in June, and this is the first session of this Committee that I have had the pleasure to address.

My first formal action when I took up my post in June was on the subject of sustainable energy. I joined the energy ministerial that was hosted in Astana by the Government of Kazakhstan in the context of the Future Energy Expo. I would like to extend my congratulations to the government of Kazakhstan for their excellent organization of and vision for both the expo and the ministerial. As I will explore in my remarks, the issues surrounding energy are of vital importance and urgency for all of us as we pursue the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 sustainable development goals. The timing and topics of the Future Energy Expo and energy ministerial were really perfect.

I also opened the 8<sup>th</sup> international forum on energy for sustainable development that was associated with the energy ministerial. I would again like to thank the government of Kazakhstan for our close cooperation, and would add UNECE's personal thanks to KazEnergy for their unstinting support without which these events would not have been possible. A final word of thanks to the Ambassador of Kazakhstan, Madame Aitzhanova, for her role in making the events successful.

Let me turn briefly to the substance of energy.

There are two important gaps in energy that are focusing our attention in UNECE concerning the commitments that have been made by countries relative to the 2030 Agenda and to the Paris Climate Agreement.

The first gap is between actions that countries are taking and the commitments they have made.

The second gap is the one found between current commitments and what is truly needed to achieve the desired outcomes.

Closing these two gaps requires strong commitments from countries to act urgently on the range of energy issues that were discussed and agreed at the Astana energy ministerial.

The agreed ministerial outcome document set out a framework for future specific actions in energy efficiency, in advanced fossil technology, in low or no-carbon alternatives, and in dealing with the energy system as a complex whole.

For the remainder of the week the 8th International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development explored the specifics of how to implement the outcomes of the ministerial. The results of the forum will be considered in this session and are likely to inform the future agenda of this committee and its subsidiary bodies. The challenges we face include reducing the environmental footprint of fossil energy while not ignoring its role in the energy system, improving the energy system's efficiency from source to use, and reducing the carbon intensity of energy. We continue to explore pathways to a sustainable energy future, to assist countries in the attainment of energy for sustainable development, and to help with the management of natural resource endowments in a manner consistent with the 2030 agenda.

You may recall the famous Doomsday Clock that uses midnight to express nuclear apocalypse and a countdown to zero to convey threats to humanity and the planet. The Clock has now become a universally recognized indicator of the world's vulnerability to catastrophe from nuclear weapons, climate change, and new technologies emerging in other domains. While there is an official body that sets the time, I suggested in Astana, and I repeat it here, that in terms of action on energy for sustainable development, it is ten past midnight.

The series of international fora on energy for sustainable development has been an important vehicle for advancing the energy agenda of the UN's Member States. Our collaboration with our sister regional commissions has been outstanding and we have worked effectively with the other international organizations dealing with energy issues, notably the IEA, the World Bank, and IRENA. The interactions with UNDP, UN DESA, UNIDO, and other parts of the UN Energy family also have been very fruitful. There are many other partners who have been involved in the process, I cannot list them all, but the results have been impressive. A specific action agenda was agreed at the 5<sup>th</sup> forum in Hammamet and considered by this Committee. The role that the regional commissions can play in advancing the sustainable energy agenda was out forward at the 6<sup>th</sup> forum in Yerevan. The 7<sup>th</sup> forum in Baku set the stage for this year's ministerial by analyzing the two gaps that I mentioned and by issuing a call for action by ministers in Astana. Ministers committed to specific actions in Astana with their outcome document and, as I noted, the 8<sup>th</sup> forum explored how those actions might best be implemented. These fora have demonstrated very powerfully the value of the regional commissions working together but in the interests of our respective member states. I would ask this Committee in the coming days to consider how best to use the opportunity we have with these international fora to accelerate the contribution energy can make.

With respect to implementation, as we move forward with our work programme and with the future fora, it will be extremely important to show concrete outcomes on energy efficiency in buildings, on advanced fossil technology, carbon capture and storage, methane management, and the like. In each of these areas of activity UNECE's work and its results have attracted significant attention among private and public sector, among NGOs, think tanks, and academia. We are succeeding substantially and substantively with the tasks you have requested, and we look forward to delivering much more in the coming years. We can make significant progress on energy for sustainable development in all of these areas, but only with the full support from you, our members, and from our other partners. I include the private sector very notably in the list of supporting cast – we will not achieve the objectives of the 2030 agenda without significant contributions and investments from the private sector, and we therefore need to include them at the table as we design the needed investment framework conditions. [a sentence about the outcome of the EXCOM deliberation on this question]. We can look forward to further progress by the regional commissions on the range of subjects both in the forum and in our regular programmes of work.

One of the desired outcomes expressed in Astana was for a regular convening of energy ministers under United Nations' auspices. I note that we have available to us for such regular convening these international fora on energy for sustainable development. Future gatherings of energy ministers under UN auspices can be organized in this context in the future if you so desire. Next year there will be a high-level political forum at which the UN's member states will assess progress to targets, including for SDG7 – I would ask this Committee to consider how best it can contribute to that assessment.

This meeting of the Committee on Sustainable Energy is extremely important, and not merely because it is my first. The Committee will be asked to endorse the work plans that have been agreed among the expert groups. The Committee will be asked to consider its broad vision for UNECE's energy subprogramme. Finally, the Committee will be asked to consider how it wishes to function to achieve the objectives of energy for sustainable development. I have full confidence in the leadership of the Committee, its chair and its Bureau, and I look forward to powerful results by the conclusion of this session.

Thank you.