

Opening Comments by Mr Raymond C. Pilcher Chair of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane

Good Morning. Representatives of the governments of the member states of the UNECE, Mr. Foster and members of Secretariat, delegates, experts, and Madame Co-Chair, Ms. Ruiz and members of the Global Methane Initiative coal subcommittee, it is an honor and pleasure to welcome all of you and to have this opportunity to Chair this, the 8th session of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on CMM.

When I look around the room, as always, I am humbled by the level expertise and commitment that the AHGE and GMI organizations apply to the mission of reducing the amount of methane that is emitted to the atmosphere during the yet still expanding extraction and use of coal. Members of these organizations comprise a broad professional background ranging from technical professionals, business leaders, policy experts and government officials; all of whom possess a working knowledge of some aspect of coal mining and an appreciation of the costs and benefits of managing gas that is at once a hazard to the miner, a powerful agent of climate change and undervalued source of energy. These are two distinct organizations, the AHGE comprises volunteer experts from many countries, each of whom brings a wealth of experience that may or may not be limited to the country within which they reside and work, and in many case receive no support from their home country, and our members take guidance from the Executive Committee of the UNECE. The Global Methane Initiative is a voluntary organization of countries that have been admitted to and organization that is committed to combat climate change stemming from methane emission on many fronts. The members of that organization take their direction from a ministerial-level steering committee.

Depending on our individual perspective and the organizational framework of our working life, we each may bring different views to the approach of the problems that we encounter on our mission as we consider how we might lessen the economic, social, and environmental costs of methane released during the extraction of coal. Depending on the role we play, we might be focused on the issues related to safely removing gas from the coal before it is mined, or combatting the emissions into the workings as mining progresses, or we may be working to capture and use the gas that continues to find a pathway to the atmosphere even after mining ceases. Others of us are working on the environmental aspects of determining how much methane is being released to the atmosphere on an annual basis, and yet others are working within the framework of carbon markets to find a way to turn waste into resource. No matter in which area we are working, none of us like to count the social costs of losing lives when coal mining communities suffer the aftermath of needless deaths caused by methane—yet communities located in coal mining countries throughout the world continue to engage in that calculus.

Over the past three years there have been explosions and ensuing investigations proving the same thing—repeatedly—these explosions are not inevitable—they are preventable. Most recently, at the end of October, we were saddened to learn that miners in Spain lost their life as they were overcome by methane that displaced the air in the mine, suffocating six and hospitalizing others. Within the same week, on the other side of the planet, seven miners in Guizhou province lost their lives to a methane explosion. We would, I am certain, rather count the benefits of capturing and using methane by employing best practices, rather than count the costs of these most recent accidents. However, these accidents happened while the costs of other accidents that claimed even more lives this year in China are still be calculated and felt by the families of those lost. Clearly—our work is not done. We need to maintain our focus and open our minds as we discuss the way forward. We have worked hard, and as a result of our commitment we are enjoying the opportunity to discuss these important issues at the UN. We must make the best of this opportunity, as the ideas that stem from our discussions and work products, may very well improve the environment, prevent senseless loss of life and expand the economic benefits of using a clean burning fuel that would otherwise be lost and damage the atmosphere. We have the opportunity to enjoy three benefits from one effort; or as it would be said in China: Yīshí sān niǎo, one stone- three birds.

We will talk later in some detail about this group's Terms of Reference (TOR), and a work programme that we will undertake to further the good work that this group has so far undertaken. But allow me to summarize our work accomplishments thus far in this way:

- We have defined terms related to coal mine methane throughout the life cycle of coal mining that allows us to communicate on a common basis.
- We have investigated the economics of mining accidents and the impact on attaining a sustainable coal mining future in gas prone coal basins. We intend to undertake more work and develop case studies that will further disseminate the principles embodied in the Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Drainage and Use in Coal Mines .
- We have engaged the UNFCCC in useful discussions, offering our services as a group of experts to the UNECE sister body, we are going to submit further comments on the latest draft of ACM0008.
- We have published a document in three languages that describes the framework of principle-based guidance to employing best practices. During the review process, we engaged the ILO to make certain that we do not infringe or interfere in the portfolio for which that organization is responsible. We are in the process of translating the document into Spanish and Mongolian.
- We have held workshops to further disseminate the concepts conveyed in the Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Drainage in Coal Mines. And now we are poised to move in three exciting directions:
 1. Expand the topics covered and continue of dissemination of Best Practices as decided by the Economic and Social Council of the UN. (Items 6 on today's agenda). We intend to undertake more work and develop case studies that will further disseminate the principles embodied in the Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Drainage and Use in Coal Mines.

2. We still hope to work on a project located at one or two mines in the coal basins of Russia utilizing extrabudgetary funding from the Russian Federation that will be used to field international experts under the management of the AHGE to review the current practices of methane extraction and use., inviting help from the ILO where necessary. (Agenda item 7)
3. Host and Participate in the Eighteenth session of the global Methane Initiative Coal Mines Subcommittee.(Agenda item 8)
4. Discuss the revision of international and national coal mine methane emissions reduction mechanisms. (Agenda item 9)
5. Continue work on establishing International Centers of Excellence, (Agenda item 10 on today's agenda). Work has begun to determine the level of interest in China as a host and we hope to make progress toward a European location as well, I am pleased to say that Poland has offered to act as a host.

We start the day with a strong mandate. We have to finalize our TOR to update them to be consistent with activities and priorities of the Committee on Sustainable energy, and following, we will adopt a programme of work consistent with our TOR. As you can see we have a great deal to consider today – please help by making your valuable inputs concise and helpful. Finally, I will say that I know from observing the diligence with which members of the bodies AHGE and GMI pursue their work that we are only limited by our imagination... and in that realm there are no boundaries.