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Keynote address
by

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Establishing Global Energy Interconnection to Accelerate Sustainable
Development

Remarks at the Opening Session

Venue: ESCAP Hall

UNDESA-GEIDCO Pavilion, Katowice, Poland
12 December 2018
9 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, Moderator,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends

First, my sincere appreciation goes to the Global Energy Interconnection Development and Cooperation Organisation and my colleagues at DESA for organizing this side event.

I am here to bring the voice of the most vulnerable people.

The world that we live in today is experiencing on the one hand incredible advances we could not even dream about 30 years ago and yet we face increasingly complex challenges and a key one is inequality.

Millions and millions of people are just barely scraping by, they survive in the fragile space between malnutrition and death, vulnerable to diseases and disasters.

We have heard of the many serious warning signs over the past days - we do not need to hear them, it just takes to keep our eyes and ears open as by now we see and hear them everywhere!

Climate change impacts know no borders - it is a great equalizer in its own way: it affects the everyday life of all of us, and it is now everyday news for all of us.

People no longer want words - they want action.

So we must get hands-on, concrete.

A very critical action area where we can bring rapid, life changing transformation to people's lives, is the area of clean, sustainable, modern energy.

The on-going transformation of the world's energy systems bringing about cost declines, cleaner technologies, and new business models, are all accelerating the deployment of renewable energy technologies. This also increases energy efficiency and does make clean energy more affordable.

The problem remains very unequal access.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we move on to implement the Paris Climate Agreement, I wish to stress that it can only be successful if we pay special attention to the vulnerable countries. We have said that we will leave no one behind and this is what people will hold us accountable for. It is a promise we cannot break and on which hinges trust in us.

OHRLLS is a voice for 91 vulnerable countries - so, almost 50 per cent of the member states of the United Nations!

But this is about the more than one billion people at risk of being left behind stretching across islands in the Pacific to landlocked countries in Central Asia, to least developed countries in Africa.

We face three types of situations: least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states. Yet they all face unique development challenges due to structural handicaps coming largely from geographical disadvantages.

For all, the lack of access to clean, affordable and reliable energy is a considerable barrier to all aspects of development.

OHRLLS places very high priority on promoting sustainable energy in vulnerable countries. This truly is a key bridge to meet the SDGs and Paris Agreement targets.

We must ensure that vulnerable countries also achieve the global goals on energy! It will spark development across sectors and support the high levels of economic growth that will be essential for these countries to achieve the SDGs.

And not just any growth - quality growth decoupled from greenhouse gas emissions.

How to do this?

We know that ensuring universal access to sustainable energy implies increasing power supply but also building robust power transmission and distribution networks. It is the networks that improve overall power reliability and make electricity more affordable.

They enable countries to tap into least-costly energy available in their region, if not in the world, and so this is exactly what GEIDCO aspires to do.

GEIDCO is indeed doing important work in this regard by advancing the global energy interconnection. Many vulnerable countries stand to benefit from this approach.

Three years have passed since the Paris Agreement was adopted and we are moving too slowly.

So allow me to share with you my perspective on how to accelerate what we do:

First, there is the strategic importance of capacity building support and access to finance.

SDG 7 is a key enabler for moving Agenda 2030 from vision to impact.

It is high time that we move from diagnostics to action. This implies that we accelerate effective capacity building support to countries for policy design and implementation of SDG 7, including for feasibility studies, project design and implementation.

This also implies that we look at how we can streamline and accelerate procedures to access and fund disbursement. There is a little voice telling me that climate change may not wait for the latest form to be filled!

Here, South-South cooperation offers tremendous potential for effectively supporting vulnerable countries in accelerating their energy transition.

Second, finance to global energy access continues to be off-track. Regions with the highest needs, like sub-Saharan Africa, are getting the smallest share of global energy finance. This trend must be reversed.

Development finance institutions and partners have traditionally played a strong role financing sustainable energy projects. This needs to continue and be scaled-up. However, the scale of the challenge before us demands that we make every effort to engage with the private sector more closely. Let us not just talk about partnerships but do them.

Similarly, strong country ownership and leadership coupled with requisite allocation of domestic resources are key.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS experience climate related almost life-threatening issues and gaining better access to energy and the positive development impacts rapid energy transition can bring to all is not a luxury - it is a MUST.

Let us accelerate access to finance and capacity building - let us give a strong helping hand that can bring rapid, life changing transformation to people's lives and end energy poverty.

OHRLLS with GEIDCO are organizing a global conference on scaling-up energy access and finance in Least Developed Countries.

The conference is scheduled for May 2019, in Beijing.

We will bring together energy experts from the 47 least developed countries and their partners, to discuss how energy financing and access can be accelerated in LDCs. I look forward to seeing many of you and count on you as partners.

We are running out of time - the urgency we face is beyond doubt.

This means we must all work together to ensure that the vulnerable countries will have access to clean, reliable, and affordable modern energy. This is about human beings: women, men, boys and girls anxious to participate in the inclusive, equitable and sustainable life paths that clean energy offers.

Thank you.