Opening Statement
by
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High Representative
And
Under-Secretary-General
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States

Opening session of the Global Conference on Scaling-up Energy Access and Finance in Least Developed Countries

Venue: Kerry Hotel

Beijing, China
30 May 2019
09:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China
Chairman Liu,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates from LDCs,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Energy is the energy we need so that the many people now again at risk of being left behind are included in making Agenda 2030 happen for all. It is the energy we need to make our climate promises happen!

I express appreciation to the Government of China for hosting the Global Conference on Scaling-up Energy Access and Finance in Least Developed Countries.

I thank GEIDCO for your partnership and collaboration in organizing this meeting,

I see many senior officials from the least developed countries here - this is good, we all need to work together and sustainable energy is of key importance for decades to come.

I welcome our development partners, the representatives of the private sector and civil society as well as representatives of international organisations and the development banks.

It takes indeed a village to keep the promises we made to people and your presence shows how to do that we need this broad team, this broad alliance of stakeholders to make the sustainable development aspirations of the most vulnerable countries reality.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

OHRLLS speaks up for the people in 91 vulnerable countries around the world - that is about 1.1 billion people.

These 91 countries represent three main groups; least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states.

They all face complex, often very unique development challenges due to demographic, geographic and structural impediments.

47 of these countries, that is the least developed countries, remain at the center of the global development challenges.

Yet, I for once say the glass is half full and challenges are there to be overcome!

The progress and prosperity of LDCs is in the larger interest of the international community as a whole from a security and development perspective and that of climate change management.
Access to sustainable, affordable and modern energy remains a core challenge for the least developed countries. Lack of this access hinders their socio-economic development.

All global agreements on sustainable development have increasingly focused on energy.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with SDG 7 calls for universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy. Emphasis is placed on efficiency gains and renewables.

Special reference is made to expanding infrastructure and upgrading technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services, in particular in the least developed countries.

This action call is further supported by the Paris Climate Change Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Both do stress the importance of sustainable energy and map out necessary actions.

The key driver in sustainable development that energy is also represents one of the eight priority areas for action in the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

We sure do not lack declarations of intent - we now MUST ACT.

The fact is that in least developed countries, half of the population still remain without access to electricity.

The average rate of access to electricity across LDCs reached 51 per cent in 2017.

This is a large increase from 33.4 per cent recorded in 2010. However, this is still far behind the global electrification rate of 88.8 per cent in 2017.

We also must realize that this data hides disparities between countries and regions, within countries and especially urban and rural areas.

In 2017, on average, 79 per cent of the urban population in LDCs had electricity access, compared with only 37.8 per cent of rural populations.

The Asia-Pacific LDCs have an electrification rate of 86.2 per cent compared to 33.2 per cent in African LDCs.

It is very alarming that the 20 least-electrified countries are all LDCs!

A key energy but also climate change issue relates to the basics of cooking and heating.

The access to modern fuels for cooking and heating are yet further limited in these countries. In 2017, only 14.4 per cent of the population in LDCs had access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking.
Business as usual will not do, 2030 is just around the corner!

So, why is this so?

Access to finance and capacity remain key challenges.

It is with urgency that we need to find ways to increase access to finance in numbers, in easier access and in faster implementation rates!

LDCs rarely can access larger financing schemes to the same extent that other, more prosperous developing countries do.

Causes for this can be found in their often smaller project size, less well-developed financial markets, capacity constraints, and challenging policy and regulatory environments.

So, if we are to turn the situation around, we must urgently work on all these fronts!

This will be critical for LDCs to access finance from all possible sources, private and public, domestic and international to meet the financing needs of their different types of projects ranging from large hydropower projects to smaller mini-grid projects.

Increased energy planning capacity and availability of plans are also critical to accelerate action with the aim to increase the viability of energy investments, lowering associated risks and making initiatives more bankable.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The history of humankind and development has taught us many times over that there is one sector which can bring rapid, life changing transformation to people’s lives, and that is again now in sustainable, modern energy.

There are many reasons why I look at the glass as being half full.

The majority of LDCs are endowed with vast reserves of renewable energy resources.

Twinning these available resources with new technologies bringing about falling prices of renewable energy offers us many new solutions for ensuring energy access for all.

The challenge to all of us here is: how can we ensure that the global momentum around sustainable energy reaches also those currently left behind and does so by 2030?

We already witness many success stories and best practices which can help us find ways for action.

It is encouraging to see the rapid progress made in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Cambodia.
They all are electrified at a rate of about 5 percentage points per year since 2010. Many LDCs have already successfully tapped into using hydropower, and the use of solar and wind power is also increasing.

Notable progress can also be seen in the use of off-grid energy solutions especially for rural areas in countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Myanmar and Rwanda.

YES! SDG7 in LDCs is within reach.

If some of the LDCs have been able to achieve rapid progress, there is no reason why others could not follow the same path.

This not only means stepping up action but it means first and foremost that it is our responsibility to work together and forge stronger partnerships!

As I said earlier, we must tackle several aspects at once to accelerate access for all.

We must accelerate efforts in creating enabling policy and regulatory frameworks. We must scale up existing initiatives. We must invest in capacity building, technology transfer and knowledge exchange. We must invest in new and in creative partnerships.

We also must look into simplification and faster access to already existing sources of finance. It cannot be that it takes years and dare I say myriads of reams of submission to get projects financed. As I have said many times and on many other occasions ever since taking up my position, we can simplify without compromising on accountability and transparency.

Improved regional collaboration also is needed to strengthen energy security, and it can be an important tool to reach needed economies of scales to attract private investments.

LDCs will need the continued, and a strong support from development partners.

One dimension we need to look into with urgency is how to strengthen private sector engagement in the sustainable energy sector.

The private sector is a key partner, but I would say also stakeholder, in the global efforts towards realizing sustainable development aspirations and mobilizing required funds. South-South collaboration should also accelerate as it is a proven and effective platform for accelerating energy transition through enabling LDCs to learn from each other and from countries who have faced similar type of challenges in the recent past.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I come back to what I said at the beginning: this take a village!
It is my hope that by bringing together all stakeholders, this conference will contribute to accelerating energy access and enhance financing for sustainable and modern energy in LDCs.

By all being together, we have a unique opportunity to share experiences and best practices with delegates from countries facing similar development challenges. We have the invaluable opportunity to listen to each other and to hear from other stakeholders what it would take to launch new partnerships.

The sessions in the next two days will discuss and hopefully come up with practical, workable solutions on scaling-up sustainable energy access and finance. During the next days, we would like to:

- showcase and discuss initiatives and financing models that can accelerate energy transition across LDCs;
- share experiences in preparing national energy investment studies and discuss best practices among LDCs, and;
- strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships in support of achieving SDG7 in LDCs.

It is my sincere hope that these no doubt two intensive days of listening and discussions will provide LDC delegates with new ideas on how to accelerate energy access, mobilize finance and bring light and transformation in the lives of people.

I also hope that the development partners and private sector representatives will see, will find avenues to expand their support for and collaboration with the least developed countries.

OHRLLS and the host country will bring back the key messages of this meeting to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum.

This is the forum which monitors the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its global Sustainable Development Goals. The messages will also be tabled at the Climate Action Summit organized by the UN Secretary-General in September.

The voices and unique views on those furthest behind must be heard. They must be heard at the global level.

In closing, I once more express appreciation to the Government of China and especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for your continued support for the cause of the LDCs through the UN-China Peace and Development Fund. The Conference demonstrates the lively partnership between China and the UN-OHRLLS in promoting progress towards the SDGs.
I thank our collaborating partner, GEIDCO for all your support and express my appreciation to Chairman Liu for his personal attention to our Conference.

I look forward to enriching, action oriented exchanges over the next two days.

Thank you.