



Remarks

by

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President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

**Official Launch of the UN Decade of
Sustainable Energy for All**

New York

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H.E. Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, President of Iceland,
Excellencies,
Secretary-General,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me say how pleased I am to be able to participate in this first annual High-level “Sustainable Energy for ALL Forum,” convened by our Secretary-General.

Our General Assembly is acutely aware of the role sustainable energy can and must play in our future planning. For this reason, the Assembly has unanimously declared the years 2014-2024 as the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All in its resolution 67/215. On behalf of the General Assembly, it is my honour and pleasure to formally launch the Decade today.

Both the High-level event and launch allow us to focus on what SE4All means in terms of transforming the lives of the poor and marginalized and, more importantly, remind us of the urgent need to deliver on our collective promise of a shared development agenda with poverty eradication at the core.

Today’s launch should also remind us that we can no longer ignore the needs of approximately 3 billion men, women and children who have the misfortune of lacking access to sustainable energy services and who are forced to eke out a living dependent on inefficient and polluting energy services. It should also spur us to bring about a positive and sustainable change for every girl child and every woman who have to trudge for miles for twigs and fuel wood, thereby denying them valuable time for learning and productive employment; for every mother who has died in childbirth because of her lack of access to energy that can power basic equipment and result in safer water; for every poor family whose health is compromised by the smoke that emanates from the use of traditional biomass and poorly designed cook stoves; and for every poor and marginalized community that struggles to eke out a living without the requisite access to energy that can empower education and better livelihoods.

The evidence is clear- ill-health and deaths caused by the heavy reliance on inefficient energy systems and badly combustible solid fuels amongst the poor are a huge threat to public health as demonstrated by the most recent World Health Organization (WHO) estimates on air pollution. The WHO has found that [quote] “*globally, 4.3 million deaths were attributable to household air pollution in 2012, almost all in low and middle income countries*” and where [quote] “*South East Asian and Western Pacific regions bear most of the burden with 1.69 and 1.62 million deaths respectively*” with almost [quote] “*600,000 deaths which occur in Africa*”. [end quote].

Excellencies,

The history of the development of modern society is inextricably intertwined with the story of the development of energy and its impact on the natural, social and economic environments. From climate change to agriculture and from gender equality to health, access to sustainable energy clearly impacts all dimensions of sustainable human development. Energy is woven into the fabric of human life at all levels, and all people and all nations need access to energy to grow and prosper. But it is precisely for this reason that the crippling lack of access to sustainable energy services is so important to address at this point in time. As we prepare to usher in a new development paradigm in the post-2015 era, the issue of sustainable energy for all must form an integral part of our deliberations on shaping a sustainable future.

The linkages between unsustainable energy practices and anthropogenic climate change can no longer be ignored. The scale of the potential human development reversals that climate change will bring about has been heavily underestimated. Unfortunately, it is the poorest and most marginalized of communities and countries that are intrinsically vulnerable because they have fewer resources with which to manage climatic risks and will feel the greatest impacts of climate change induced shocks and catastrophic events.

In this regard, I warmly welcome our Secretary General’s initiative to convene a Summit of Heads of State and Government this September to seek practical solutions

to tackle climate change and provide the necessary political impetus to the ongoing negotiations aimed at arriving at a comprehensive agreement in 2015.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenge before us all as members of this generation is to transform the story of modern energy. The extremities in pricing, the wastefulness and destructiveness in energy extraction, inequalities in access, inefficiencies in production and delivery must give way to a new kind of modern energy. It must become a tool for resource conservation, new innovation, the creation of decent work and growth, the eradication of poverty and the building of sustainable societies and economies.

This will demand from all of us a collaborative and concerted effort, involving all stakeholders and I am pleased to see the momentum has already begun. This Forum and the launch of the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All coming together on this World Environment Day, could not be more fortuitous. Prior to today, there have been some regional and thematic launches of the Decade across the world, from places like the base for our Headquarters here at New York City to New Delhi, India and from Kigali, Rwanda all the way to Nadi, Fiji.

Many more activities will follow in the next months and throughout the ten years to come. In two weeks' time, students from across the world will hold regional energy summits. These meetings will highlight how postgraduate students can shape their careers to lead the global transition towards a sustainable energy future. The creative energies, passion and potential for innovation can make these young people powerful agents for global energy change.

And each one of us can become the same. This Decade is indeed an opportunity to seek new partners, projects, and actions, as well as to exchange experiences and expertise. But we need to do more now – we need to translate rhetoric into action, words into scalable practices and effective delivery of energy services.

Distinguished Guests,

The crucial importance of energy was clearly underscored in the recent Thematic Debate I convened on “Water, Sanitation and Sustainable Energy in the Post-2015 Development Agenda” in February this year.

Participants agreed that access to water, sanitation and sustainable energy is a major enabler of poverty eradication and sustainable development. They recognised that these basic services contribute to sustained economic growth and improved living standards, and are critical to achieving other major development goals.

The Debate highlighted the nexus between energy and water. Many mentioned the intrinsic linkages between energy and other areas such as agriculture, food security, health, education, infrastructure, climate change, peace and security, and gender equality.

Throughout the Debate, there was broad support for a dedicated stand-alone goal on energy. Possible targets included ensuring universal access to modern energy services, doubling the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency, and doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.

Like many of you gathered here, I am therefore pleased that the Co-chairs of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have included energy as a stand-alone goal among seventeen (17) possible SDGs, with targets and time lines in the Zero Draft, released only three days ago. This represents a critical step forward and I look forward to the further meeting of the minds by Member States on these goals, targets and timelines as the debate and preparation for post-2015 continues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel heartened and optimistic to look out and see representatives from diverse stakeholders – political leaders, business innovators, civil society actors and international organisations gathered here today. Through our collective determination and action and our creativity, we can ensure that lack of access to energy no longer consigns poor households to ill-health and limited opportunities. With the launching of this Decade of SE4All, we can commit ourselves to ensuring that the energy that

powers our world no longer threatens our environment, our communities and our homes, but instead lights the way towards a better future for all people and our planet.

Thank you.
