



**Remarks by Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa,**

**Ms. Cristina Duarte at the**

**12<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) Assembly**

**Ministerial Meeting on**

**“Just and Inclusive Energy Transitions in Africa: Promoting Development and  
Industrialization”**

**14 January 2022**

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

All protocols observed.

Allow me to start by thanking the International Renewable Energy Agency for the invitation to participate in this meeting. The Office of Special Adviser on Africa is grateful for the opportunity.

If we assess best practices of countries promoting economic transformation, ensuring food security, digitalizing education, revolutionizing health systems, building manufacturing, and industrialization capacities, or sustaining peace by creating quality jobs and delivering services, we will realize that no country in the world has achieved these ambitions without abundant and affordable access to energy.

Moreover, energy is the foundational building block to achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals and to build Africa's resilience, especially as the continent struggles to adapt to climate change, including adverse weather events, water scarcity, and significant threats to livelihoods.

However, even though Africa is home to 17 percent of the world's population, the continent represents only 3.3 percent of global primary energy consumption, 1.1 percent of electricity generation, and 3 percent of global energy use in industry.

This means that African countries have a very long way to go in electrifying homes, supplying sustained and reliable energy for industrial use, as well as providing adequate and affordable clean cooking solutions.

Renewable energy sources, including geothermal and hydropower, have significant potential in building Africa's balanced energy mix.

With advancements in off-grid and utility-scale renewable technologies, there is a great opportunity to provide electricity for Africa's citizens especially through last-mile connections.

Doing so would free up grid systems to use a mixture of energy sources to supply power to high-energy industries and manufacturing, which have very little room for intermittency.

Without high power reliability, Africa's industrial ambitions would have high operational costs and reduced productivity, which would make it impossible to compete in international markets.

Against this backdrop, there are several layers of complexity in Africa's energy access and just transition.

To give you an example, Africa's most suitable areas for utility-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) and wind power lie in the Sahel belt, which faces significant challenges in terms of peace and security.

In addition to instability, large swathes of this region are inaccessible due to a lack of transportation infrastructure.

This is one of the many reasons why we need a nuanced approach when we look at what is possible versus what is achievable.

Another factor to this complexity is the significant issue of financing.

Africa currently accounts for just 4 per cent of global power supply investment and even this is concentrated in a handful of countries across the continent.

Achieving a reliable electricity supply for all would require an almost fourfold increase, to around \$120 billion a year through 2040.

The current investment and implementation rate are very slow.

As an example, over the past decade, the total solar additions amounted to 8.5 gigawatts across all of Africa.

And to put things in perspective, New York City alone uses an average of 8 to 11 gigawatts.

Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen,

We need to do better. We need a new deal.

We need investment in research and development of Africa-centric new technologies to help develop renewable resources to build optimal energy mixes that take into account the continent's unique natural resources, endowments, and development paths.

We need to invest in making green jobs a reality and something worthwhile for African countries by shifting the manufacturing of renewable energy components such as solar panels to the continent.

Finally, we need to invest in making Africa's grids efficient and in building the financial viability and capacities of African utilities to regulate and manage increased renewables in the energy mix.

The Office of the Special Adviser on Africa is ready to work with IRENA, the African Development Bank, African Member States, and partners in transforming these needs into realities.

Thank you.