Speech at the opening of
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United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) in collaboration with
Korea Association of Energy, Climate Change and Environment (KAECE),
and Korean Ministry of Environment,

Young- Mok Kim (Former President of KOICA and President of the G&M Foundation Korea)

Mr. Yoon Jong Soo, Dr. Dong Jong In, Dr. Somrat Kerdsuwan, distinguished speakers and participant,

I am so honoured to attend this meaningful workshop prepared and hosted by UNOSD in collaboration with KAECE, and the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Korea.

It has been more than two years since the world adopted a new global development agenda of SDGs and agreed to put the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in action. We believe that these two pillars will play a key role in guiding the direction of our efforts and coordinating policies in domestic and global development for the coming years.

In order to achieve the 17 SDGs, addressing challenges to secure sustainable environment through cleaner energy has become the most urgent task for every country and international community as a whole. This is not only because we should abide by the cause of these two new pillars of world development, but also because there is a practical and dire need to secure sustainable environment for both the humanity and the planet.

UN organizations, scientists, governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as investors and firms in the private sector have united to promote and to carry out these goals.

The most urgent goal is the management of waste, particularly by focusing on Waste-to-Energy facilities. We are probably all aware that we create and live on million tons of waste and that this waste should be properly treated, most ideally converted into energy.

The good news is that many countries are increasing investment in renewable energy resources. The growth rate of renewable energy has already surpassed the growth rate of other energy resources. In addition, total renewable energy production is surpassing nuclear energy production on a world level. However, investment in waste management still remains low and, as you can imagine, Waste-to-Energy promotion is not the top priority in most developing countries.

Southeast Asia and Asia in general have showed remarkable economic growth and astonishing development. Naturally, accelerating development entailed increasing urbanization. This rapid and continuing urbanization, while it has its merits, is creating big challenges in most of the countries in our region. From my own observation, there are couple of reasons for the weak investment in Waste-to-Energy in the region.

First, both the government and the general public have low awareness of the need for waste management and Waste-to-Energy. In another word, waste management awareness is lower compared to the awareness of other social infrastructure needs.

This may be due to the weak understanding of the linkage among the environment, energy, water and our health, which I can call a nexus of healthy environment. Smart waste-management such as WTE is one good part of this nexus.

Furthermore, the policy makers need to understand that WTE could greatly contribute to, in larger context, reducing inequality in many aspects of socio-economic life by attracting investment and decent jobs thanks to clean environment and affordable energy.

Second, most governments of the developing countries are tempted to prioritize visible goals, such as building infrastructures, big-size energy plants over waste management either for meeting immediate demands or for political reasons.

As a result, many developing countries were not enthusiastic about establishing a right and smart governance and institution, by which investment, both public and private, can be executed with financial and social returns. For example, without an adequate system of waste separation, collection paid dumping, and a balanced pricing on energy purchase, establishing and operating Waste-to-Energy facility is not workable technically or financially.

This is a reminder that it is crucial to understand the connection of the SDGs, such as good health (Goal 3), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), renewable energy (Goal 7), sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), and climate action (Goal 13). Creating a clean environment (air, ground, underground, and water) in populated and industrialized areas will finally help inclusive growth and many communities.

At present, we need to make efforts to achieve optimum level of WTE by developing and distributing different level of technologies for reuse or recycle, for example, which will fit for demands from small local community to large municipality. A variety of technology and engineering solutions currently in place can be further upgraded and utilized by proper financial support. In every cases, we need to design and introduce a comprehensive system or platform under which every required elements can be mobilized.

In this regard, effective coordination among different stakeholders, various agencies, central and local governments is always the first step to take. In addition, smart mix of financing by both public and private and a policy allowing this mix is crucial.

Our task is to establish an effective governing system that can create synergies between multiple SDGs. The task needs a cultural change of both public and policy makers in addition to introducing technologies and securing “sustainable financing”. I would conclude that promotion of WTE is one of the best practical solution in achieving both goals of SDGs and Paris Agreement on climate change.

I hope our workshop provides an excellent opportunity for all of us to learn about each other and to share all aspects of WTE promotion.

Thank you for your attention.

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