

Opening Remarks
Mr. Jean D'ARAGON, Senior Sustainable Development Expert, UNOSD

Symposium on SDG 7 (Energy)
in Preparation for
the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

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UNDESA, UNOSD, Norwegian Research Council, SINTEF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

As a representative of the UN Office for Sustainable development (UNOSD), co-organizer of this symposium, it is my great pleasure and a true honour to welcome you all to this very important event.

I would like to thank my colleagues, especially Ivan VERA, from DSD / UN DESA, as well as the Norwegian Research Council, SINTEF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway for making this event possible.

I am delighted to note such a wide geographical representation among the participants gathered in this room today.

I am also very pleased to note the diversity of this group, composed of representatives of governments, UN organizations, experts and researchers working in energy and other interconnected fields and sectors.

We believe it is more than ever essential to share knowledge, experiences and best practices to build capacities of stakeholders from developed and developing countries alike and discuss how best to advance SDG 7 and its interlinkages with other SDGs, and this, even more, at only a few months before the first global review of SDG7 at the 2018 High-Level Political Forum.

The Division for Sustainable Development and UNOSD, which are, actually, both part of UN DESA, have hosted a few energy-related meetings recently.

Indeed, we held two such meetings last year and, with the main objective of contributing to the first global review of SDG 7 in the 2018 HLPF, we have organized 2 workshops related to energy this year, including one in Bangkok, last June, and this Symposium, here in Oslo, starting today.

We will also be co-organizing the Preparatory Meeting on SDG 7 of the 2018 HLPF, which will take place in Hong Kong early next year (on the 6th and 7th of February).

Energy is gradually becoming more important in UNOSD's work programme.

Our Office has commissioned a study and published a report analysing the impacts of fossil fuel energy in African and Ocean Island States, where we also held some Fossil Fuel to Renewable Energy (or FFRE) transition workshops since 2014.

We are currently planning another FFRE transition workshop, which shall take place in Costa Rica in December 2017.

Energy is central to sustainable development. As you may remember, drawing from his own experiences as a boy in post-war Korea, studying at night by a dim and smoky oil lamp, former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon qualified Energy as the “the golden thread connecting economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability.”

As you know, over one third of the world population has no access to sustainable energy to cook and heat their homes. Although 1.7 billion people gained access to electricity between 1990 and 2010, this was only slightly ahead of population growth of 1.6 billion during the same period.

It is also very important that we keep in mind that the limited progress towards universal energy access over the recent years has mostly taken place in urban areas (low-hanging fruit?), leaving people living in rural areas behind.

While most often affecting the poorest, the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, the lack of access to energy is also exacerbating gender inequalities.

As we are well aware, in many developing countries women and children bear the burden of firewood and other solid fuel collection and transport. They also suffer the most from indoor air pollution and unsafe cooking technologies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The clock is ticking. Two years have passed since the adoption of the SDGs, including SDG 7. We need to learn from each other and work better together to accelerate our progress in reaching those who are left behind, and achieve the Goal 7 on Energy by 2030.

The fact is that while access to energy can accelerate social and economic progress and enhance productivity, it is nevertheless also affecting the ecosystem and the environment.

Although it is undeniable that countries need access to energy for their development, the energy-intensive development model is not possible anymore. In order to increase the rate of energy access, we can no longer simply supply more energy the unsustainable way we used to do before.

Besides increasing the share of renewables in the global energy mix, we also need to reduce our energy consumption and using energy more efficiently.

Whereas many countries have already embarked in the implementation of renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes on their own —which is certainly laudable, more coordinated policies and measures are needed at local, national and international

levels to make global energy systems more economically-efficient, environmental-friendly and socially equitable.

As you know, the central theme of the 2018 High Level Political Forum will be “*Transformation Towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies*” and will include the in-depth review of SDG 6 (Water and Sanitation); SDG7 (Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all); SDG11 (Sustainable cities); SDG12 (Sustainable Consumption and production); and SDG15: Sustainable Ecosystems and forests.

Of course, this is in no way reflecting the exhaustive list of the interlinkages between the SDG 7 and the other SDGs.

We need to identify and understand better all the various (multi-dimensional) inter-linkages between the SDG 7 and the other SDGs, and recognize how generating and consuming energy may produce different impacts in different contexts (between and within different regions or countries), where energy resource availability and level of development of the energy infrastructure are different.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will agree with me that this symposium is very important.

And your presence and active participation in this meeting over the next three days is, by itself, a remarkable proof of your commitment to improve our collective understanding and capacity to advance SDG 7 and the interlinkages with other SDGs.

I wish you all the best for a successful symposium.

Thank you very much!