

**Dr. Shamshad Akhtar,
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations & Executive Secretary of
The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

***Opening Remarks
Global SDG7 Conference***

UNCC, Bangkok, 22 February 2018

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Welcome to ESCAP and to the Global SDG7 Conference. I thank DESA and the Ministry of Energy of the Kingdom of Thailand for their partnership with ESCAP in organizing this meeting. I am also grateful to Her Excellency Marie Chatardová, the President of ECOSOC, for chairing this conference.

SDG7 is a blueprint for the development of energy in the 21st Century, based on sustainability and equality. It proposes profound change in how we generate, consume and provide energy. It is appropriate that we meet in the Asia-Pacific, a region that is leading the move towards a sustainable energy future.

Progress on SDG7 is being made globally. But let me start with the advancements in Asia and the Pacific.

First, remarkable progress has been made to broaden electricity access. 90 per cent of the region's population has access to basic electricity services, up from 70 per cent in 1990. This has been achieved largely by governments' extending national grids. However, 10 per cent of our region, some 420 million people, remain without access, deprived of the means of being economically productive.¹ Sustained political will, and increased public and private finance, are needed to close this gap. Innovative technology and business approaches could also enhance rural electrification. But while electrification has progressed apace, widening access to clean fuels and technologies has been slower. Only 50 per cent of people in this region can access clean cooking fuel: the second lowest rate among all regions.

¹ SE4ALL, 2017 Global Tracking Framework, <http://www.se4all.org/global-tracking-framework>

Second, energy efficiency - the critical constituent of sustainable energy - can both enhance productivity and reduce emissions. Enhanced energy efficiency is taking hold in the Asia-Pacific as energy intensity continues to decline. While our energy intensity is higher than in other regions, the rate of improvement is greater. The annual improvement of Asia-Pacific over the 2012 to 2014 Global Tracking Framework period was 3 per cent - above the SDG7 target benchmark of 2.6 per cent - and above the global average of 2.1 per cent.² The majority of ESCAP member States have established energy efficiency or conservation targets and incorporated energy efficiency in their Paris climate commitments.

Yet we remain the most energy intensive region in the world. Among ESCAP countries, 16 have increased their energy intensity from 2012 to 2014. More detailed analysis is required to identify options to enhance their energy efficiency.

There is nevertheless cause of optimism: the Asia-Pacific region is leading the global move to renewable energy. Deployment of renewable energy technology continues to increase at unprecedented rates. In 2016, Asia-Pacific countries, led by China and India, commissioned over 94 gigawatts of renewable generation, 59 per cent of the global total.³ However, the entrenched role of fossil fuels will take some time to shift. We need to support countries to exploit their renewable energy potential through multilateral approaches – financing, technical support, joint project development and sharing the policies that have worked successfully. Supported by ESCAP, Asia-Pacific regional power trading is emerging as a key avenue to export renewable electricity from surplus to deficit countries.

Meeting our future energy needs in a sustainable way will require innovative systems thinking. Innovation and the digital revolution are merging to usher in more sustainable and consumer-friendly energy approaches through storage, electric vehicles, smart grids and blockchain energy trading. Solar power and efficient lighting are reducing energy access costs in remote areas. Replacing thermal generation plants with renewables increases efficiency, saving primary energy. Using distributed renewable generation reduces network losses. The SDG7 targets can be pursued as mutually reinforcing elements.

The 2018 High Level Political Forum, with the theme “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”, will undertake the first global review of SDG7. Next month ESCAP will

² ibid

³ Renewable capacity highlights: http://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2017/Mar/RE_stats_highlights_2017.pdf?la=en&hash=7C535399F0994173AE445772FE62FF8C156D39DE

convene the 5th *Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development*, which along with the ESCAP led *Second Ministerial Asian and Pacific Energy Forum* will work to accelerate regional progress towards SDG7. Given the diversity in Asia-Pacific, the journey required to achieve SDG7 depends on the unique challenges and opportunities each country faces. And besides cooperation among stakeholders to effectively implement conducive energy strategies, availability of finance will be critical.

SDG7 is an extraordinary opportunity for our generation - one that will create jobs, promote a cleaner environment and increase the productivity of our economies. This is an opportunity we should seize.