

Third session of the Committee on Energy

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24 February 2021

Opening Remarks

(<https://www.unescap.org/speeches/third-session-committee-energy>)

Mr Kulit Sombatsiri, the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Energy Thailand,

Mr Mohammad Hossein, Director General, Power Cell, Ministry of Power, Energy & Mineral Resources, Bangladesh, and the Chair of the second session of the Committee on Energy,

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A warm welcome to all delegations to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) as well as those joining remotely from capitals to the [Third Session of the Committee on Energy](#).

The past year has been a testing and transformative time for the Asia-Pacific region. As we work together to recover better from the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCAP has been using its regional platform to support our members States to respond to the long-term challenges of building back better.

The pandemic has reminded us that a reliable and uninterrupted energy supply is an essential part of our ability to respond to this type of crisis. Energy is essential not just for hospitals and healthcare, but to support the systems and coping mechanisms we rely on to work remotely, continue education and to communicate essential health information to citizens. For this next phase of the crisis, it will also underpin cold chains and logistics to ensure billions of vaccines make their way to people who need it most.

Yet, the access to clean cooking is an area requiring substantial policy focus as only 61 per cent of the region's population had access to clean cooking in 2018. Closing this gap by 2030 will require a redoubling of efforts to roll out clean cooking technology solutions and business models. Similarly, the region's share of modern renewable energy, excluding traditional biomass reached about 8.2 per cent in 2017, which requires further coordinated push.

These energy statistics underscore the importance of taking concrete action to steer sustainable energy transition in our region.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

As we move from the immediate health crisis to long term recovery, I would like to emphasise that sustainable energy can play a key part in this recovery. ESCAP has been emphasising the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a guiding framework for recovering better.

If we progress the SDGs with greater determination, we can address many of the systemic issues that made societies more vulnerable to COVID-19 pandemic and ensure societies are more able to weather future crises.

Our flagship 2021 Regional Trends Report titled [“Shaping a sustainable energy future in Asia and the Pacific: A greener, more resilient and inclusive energy system”](#) provides analysis on these issues and presents an up to date snapshot of the regions’ progress on SDG7.

In this context, accelerating regional progress on SDG7: Clean and affordable energy offers an opportunity to assist countries of the Asia-Pacific region recover from the pandemic towards a cleaner and low carbon future.

The report highlights that there are significant gaps in achieving allSDG7 targets by 2030. So, by directing stimulus spending to investments in renewable energy, there are opportunities to generate jobs while addressing sustainability and climate targets.

Similarly, by investing in energy efficiency we can reduce costs for businesses and households that could further draw resources from economic stimulus and relief measures.

By increasing expenditure on clean cooking and electricity access, member States can enhance economic activity in rural areas and set in place modern infrastructure than can make these communities more resilient and more inclusive for the wellbeing of women and children.

Furthermore, drawing on the most up to date data across the SDG7 targets, the analysis in this report considers a range of examples and key lessons from the varied experience across the Asia-Pacific region to inform and improve future decision-making efforts.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

The Committee can play a transformative role in many areas - achieving SDG7 and the Paris Agreement, connecting the region’s power grids, addressing energy inequalities and tackling emerging issues in the energy landscape.

With this background, allow me to convey the following key messages to you as you conduct your deliberations in the Committee.

First, let us focus on regional cooperation on energy that will help in tracking progress on SDG7 and highlight gaps where more progress needs to be made.

We continue to see strong progress on access to electricity with overall 95.6 per cent of the population having access to electricity in 2018. Universal access to electricity in urban areas has almost been achieved, however rural areas which are often in harder to reach locations lag behind. As we approach universal electricity access for the region, we need to turn our attention to improving the efficiency and quality of electricity.

Second, let us focus on renewable energy.

In our region, while the pace of renewable energy installations has been strong, it has not been sufficient to capture a significant share against a background of growing appetite for energy.

Phasing out the use of coal from power generation portfolios, with substitution by renewables, ending fossil fuel subsidies and implementing carbon pricing are some of the steps ESCAP has been advocating. In this context, we recently launched a new UN ESCAP report [“Coal phase out and energy transition pathways for Asia and the Pacific”](#).

As renewables in the electricity can grow faster than other elements of the energy system, we must also electrify more end uses sectors such as transport and heat to maximize the value of renewable energy in the system.

Third, let us further deliberate to better connect and promote cross-border electricity connectivity for sustainable development.

The work undertaken by ESCAP on this issue is intended to forge a common regional strategy toward increased, sustainable power system connectivity. It is for that reason we hope you will endorse the draft road map for regional power grid connectivity, which member States worked together to revise and improve at the informal consultation process ESCAP organised last November.

This roadmap provides a set of concrete strategies for increasing power system integration by improving the way countries in the region plan, develop and operate their grids, while also ensuring that increased connectivity works in service of both national policy priorities and overarching sustainability goals.

The importance of this long-term effort stems not only from the possibility it offers to enable access to more reliable and lower cost electricity supplies, but also from the opportunity to tap

into the vast renewable energy potential in the region and to help accelerate the overall decarbonisation of the region.

I am pleased to recognise the recent announcements of carbon neutral from a number of member States in this region demonstrated the ambition and determination that also requested accelerated transformation to sustainable energy.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

ESCAP will continue to support its member States to navigate a path out of the COVID-19 crisis. We have worked continuously to reorient our intergovernmental dialogues, our analytical work and capacity building to support these goals across all the sectors we cover.

Energy is no exception. This crisis should not deflect us from the urgent tasks of making modern energy available to all and decarbonising the region's energy system.

Rather it should provide us with a renewed sense of urgency and a series of opportunities to harness the capacities of sustainable energy can deliver societies, economies and the environment as we build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We count on your leadership to progress the ambitious and cross-cutting agenda through the Energy Committee. As the newest of our intergovernmental committees, I feel we have only begun to exploit the potential of regional cooperation on energy.

Therefore, your deliberations on these energy issues are critical to help the region plan a course ahead through these challenging times in Asia and the Pacific.

I wish you a very successful Committee session.

Thank you very much.