



HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM SIDE EVENT REPORT

RENEWABLE ENERGY AS AN ECONOMIC DRIVER OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Hosted by the Permanent Missions of Germany, Sri Lanka and the UAE to the UN; Pace University's Elisabeth Haub School of Law (Pace); the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA); and the International Council of Environmental Law

Delegates to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) convened 18 July to discuss the scope of renewable energy's contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as outline key priorities for the 2018 HLPF, which will have an energy focus. Six specialists presented a broad spectrum of perspectives, from renewable energy leaders China and Germany, to emerging hubs like the UAE and developing countries Sri Lanka and Pakistan, as well as from the global standpoint of IRENA and the legal expertise of the Pace University Center for Energy and Climate Change and of the International Council of Environmental Law.

Renewable energy, the event found, has become one of the most promising drivers for sustainable development, offering a way to reduce energy costs for households and businesses, while also increasing jobs and social benefits (like reliable powering of health and education facilities) and reducing environmental impacts. Accordingly, IRENA reports that more than 170 Member States have established renewable energy targets, and 150 have support policies to further accelerate deployment of renewable technologies, focused on the power sector. Renewables

are now the predominant source of electricity installed worldwide, and account for one out of five energy units delivered to consumers.

During the panel discussion, moderated by Minoru Takada, Team Leader (Sustainable Energy) at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, participants particularly looked at policies to pass renewables' cost savings to consumers and businesses, increase jobs, and facilitate private investment.

H.E. Gamini Jayawickrama Perera, Minister of Sustainable Development and Wildlife of Sri Lanka, made the lead presentation, emphasizing the importance of renewable energy to economic development in his country, which has enacted a goal of achieving 100% of its electricity from renewable energy by 2030. The other panelist experts were:

- Professor Mingde Cao, China University of Political Science and Law, Beijing, China
- Prof. Shakeel Hussain Kazmi, New York University Abu Dhabi
- Reinhard Krapp, Minister, Head of Economic Department, Permanent Mission of Germany
- Dane McQueen, Senior Advisor, Development & Humanitarian Affairs, UAE Permanent Mission
- Yera Ortiz de Urbina, Senior Liaison Officer, IRENA
- Prof. Richard Ottinger, Dean Emeritus, Pace University Elizabeth Haub School of Law's Energy and Climate Center, and a Member of the International Council of Environmental Law.

In summary, the experts presented the following key take-aways from the event:

- Renewable energy costs are frequently lower today than those of any other energy medium (even including natural gas in major producers like the US and UAE), despite annual trillion dollar plus global fossil fuel subsidies and omission of externality costs like pollution.
- Renewable energy jobs continue to increase (9.8 million in 2016, up from 7.1 million in 2012) in contrast with fossil fuel jobs, which face global cuts.

- Women are better-represented in renewable energy than in the energy sector at large, but challenges remain for women in regard to employment and promotion;
- Lack of access to sustainable energy is often a market failure, as renewables are almost always significantly cheaper than diesel. Using renewables to end energy poverty, especially in rural and off-grid areas, should therefore be a major focus for the UN at the country level.
- Capacity-building and awareness-raising are two of the key de-risking tools for renewable energy investment, as many actors (banks, regulators, utilities, policymakers, the general public, etc.) inflate costs because they are unaware of renewable energy advances and often see technologies as new and different; education and experience tend to lower costs dramatically.
- Clear investment frameworks, such as public-private partnership laws, net metering, reverse auctions, and on-bill financing arrangements, are proven to be effective at raising private capital. Legal tools for successful renewable energy projects exist for every country situation, as presented in detail in the 2016 UNEP Guide For Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Laws.
- Legal incentives for the transition to renewable energy (such as portfolio standards) can be useful spurs to overcome “business as usual” mindsets. Resistance is evident in pending petitions to the World Trade Organization seeking to end subsidies for renewable energy while not eliminating many times larger subsidies for fossil fuels.

The panel concluded that renewable energy, and sustainable energy more broadly, must be central to efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Energy is often forgotten or glossed over as the basis for almost all modern human activity, seen as separate from the healthcare, education, IT, construction, sanitation, etc. that it enables. The 2018 HLPF, therefore, presents an important opportunity to evidence the way sustainable energy underpins other SDGs, and the co-benefits achieved through renewable energy policy reform and investment.

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