

GLOBE – The Global Legislators Organisation
GLOBE COP20 Legislators Summit Proceedings
7 December 2014

Title:

Keynote Speech by Adnan Z. Amin, Director-General IRENA

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today at this significant moment in our history.

The sense of urgency we all feel in Lima leaves little doubt that the time for debating climate change is coming to an end, and the time for taking action is upon us.

Either we succeed together in reducing global carbon emissions, or the world will become an increasingly hostile environment for us all, especially the poor.

So how do we do that?

From our perspective in IRENA we deal with the challenge of moving the world to a sustainable energy path as an economic imperative. In the interface with climate, one thing is clear. More than 80% of human-caused CO₂ emissions come from burning fossil fuels for energy. Of that, 44% comes from coal, 36% from oil and 20% from natural gas. So to bring down carbon emissions, our energy mix must be our priority in the coming years.

With current technology, there are only four major tools we have to reduce CO₂ emissions from energy: nuclear energy, carbon capture and storage, greater energy efficiency, and renewable energy.

With respect to nuclear, typically nuclear plants take a decade to build and many governments have decided to move away from nuclear, while some others have decided to invest on more “secure” plants for the future. CCS development has lagged behind needed levels, and most countries have stopped its development.

This leaves us with energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Over the past five years, RE technology has improved so fast, and the cost of deployment has fallen so quickly, that we can viably double the world share of renewables by 2030, to 36%.

If we add energy efficiency gains to that, this scaling-up could keep CO₂ levels below the tipping point. And because renewable energy has become so cheap, we could do this more economically than meeting our demand with fossil fuels.

The challenge is that falling prices of RE technologies alone are not enough.

The major obstacle today isn't the cost of renewable energy. It's the system of rules and infrastructure designed to support oil and gas and coal, and the perceived risk in switching course at this point.

To change that system fast enough will require a large and concerted push by governments everywhere. And national legislators will need to form the cornerstone of that push. It's your job to make that change happen.

That is why the work you do at home, and in organisations like Globe, is so extremely important. And that is why I thank you for this great opportunity to lay out our case.

WHAT IRENA IS AND DOES

I represent the International Renewable Energy Agency. Over the past four years, IRENA has become the global authority on how the world can make the clean energy transition happen.

We now have more than 170 countries engaged in IRENA activities. We are based in UAE, in the heart of an oil producing region. We have offices in Bonn and New York, and we have activities all over the world to support countries promote renewables.

We do this on two levels.

On the global level, we have a number of major knowledge products providing a clear picture: on power generation costs, on socio-economic benefits to switching to renewable energy, on financing issues, major trends affecting the transition.

But just as importantly, we are also getting involved at the national and regional level, helping countries to identify their particular resources, to attract renewable energy investors, and to adopt the best legislation and policies to harness their potential and create an enabling environment for this transition.

In other words, we can offer you the latest best and most transparent big picture data available on renewable energy. And we can tailor our advice to your specific needs, taking into account each country's unique energy landscape.

REMAP 2030 AND RETHINKING ENERGY

Recently, in response to the SE4ALL challenge to double renewables by 2030, IRENA launched a global study to determine whether and how we could double the share of renewable energy by 2030. We call it REmap 2030.

Its release earlier this year send a powerful message that has been heard across the world. We can fix climate change with renewable energy, but only if we massively accelerate our efforts.

REmap projects that we can double the global share of renewables from 18% to 36% by 2030 providing a realistic chance to keep carbon below 450 ppm.

Now we are following up Remap 2030 with country specific studies. The first ones were US and China, right before the announcement. I presented the Remap China report only last week in Beijing, and we have reports coming soon in North America, Europe, southern Asia and the Middle East.

In September we launched a new flagship series called RETHinking Energy. One of those launches was at the Senate in Paris. Aimed at policy-makers, the launch edition proposed a profound shift in the way countries approach electricity-systems planning and market design. We have shared this publication with you today and welcome any feed-back you have on it.

Along with a wealth of other reports on real time costs, 6.5 million jobs, and other key elements of the transition, we can offer all the information you need on the pathways to achieve your renewable energy goals in the particular circumstances of your country.

ROLE OF LEGISLATORS

To drive the rapid global uptake of renewables, legislators have to take an urgent and active approach, adopting new policy frameworks at the national and regional levels.

There is no fixed formula to make this happen. Every country is different, and each will need to develop a policy mix that best suits its particular conditions. But certain principles apply across markets.

- The renewable energy transition requires a new generation of legislation and policies. This includes providing a stable and long-term policy environment, which reduces risk for businesses and mobilizes finance.
- Renewable energy targets can play an instrumental role. To date, 144 countries have renewable energy targets in place. However, there are many target types and their effectiveness varies greatly. The engagement of key stakeholders and the process of setting the target can be as important, if not more, than the level of the target itself.
- To work properly, RE policies need to be accompanied by supporting measures - such as investment promotion, technology transfer, and education – as well as regulations on the interplay with other policies, such as energy efficiency, carbon markets, and labour laws.
- Rules are urgently needed to better integrate renewable energy into existing energy infrastructure.
- Legislators need to become much better informed of rapidly changing facts, and generate informed debate as circumstances change. Just to give you an example the cost of solar has decreased 70% in the last 5 years. Citing figures from a few years ago will lead to misguided conclusions; government assumptions are being fast outpaced by events.
- And legislators have a major role to play in stimulating public support. People are naturally inclined to support renewable energy, but can be turned against it by scaremongering and out-of-date myths.

Worldwide, we can see policies are moving in the right direction.

At least 144 countries have set RE targets – and 138 have supportive policies in place.

We see an evolution towards policies differentiated by technology, policies to integrate renewable electricity into existing power systems, and policies to promote energy storage, demand-side management, and smart grid technologies.

But the change is still not happening fast enough.

IRENA AND LEGISLATORS

IRENA can offer a number of ways to help you accelerate your progress

- We are currently working on a state-of-the art online platform that links around 15 renewable energy databases to create the definitive one stop shop of renewable energy information. With your feed-back, we will ensure that this is as legislator-friendly as possible.
We are exploring how to involve legislators in more IRENA initiatives. For example, I have discussed with Globe's leadership how to include your perspective into a Coalition to Bolster Public Support for Renewable Energy. We also hope to engage Legislators when we provide Renewables Readiness Assessments for Member countries.
- We can provide countries, upon request, with technical advice and support to enable you to formulate and prepare renewable energy targets and strategies as part of your climate work, including preparation of your intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs).

Two examples show how importance this collaboration can be.

In 2011, we completed a renewable readiness assessment for Senegal. But progress was held back. IRENA met with the vice-Chair of the Parliament to find a way to unblock it. Within one month, two new decrees were adopted to promote renewables and now Senegal is one of the fastest growing markets in West Africa.

Similarly, in 2012, we recommended a renewable energy law for Niger. IRENA held a meeting with the Chairman of the Parliament, and shortly after the law was passed.

The reason we can help legislators accelerate action, is because we can speak from a position of independent authority. We don't have a commercial or a political business. We can help you with advice and technical knowledge to break through your national blockages.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

We can also help you demonstrate the wider benefits for society as a whole.

For example, we can show why renewables are great for jobs. A recent IRENA study shows that clean energy supported 6.5 million direct and indirect jobs in RE in 2013, up 14% from 2012, and has the potential of adding millions more. We know that one of the issues for legislators is how to improve the economy especially for the younger generations.

We can show how renewable energy offers far greater access to people currently left off the grid, with potential to open up opportunities for 1.3 billion people worldwide without electricity.

We can show how renewables offer greater security, because they reduces dependence on imported fuels. We can demonstrate how they are good for the balance sheet, freeing up funds for socially beneficial investments.

And we can show the enormous benefits of renewables to healthcare, bringing global health-related costs down by up to USD 200 billion annually.

In other words, we can show you the best legislative route to increasing renewables in your countries, and provide the arguments to show your publics why it is the best way forward.

REGIONAL

IRENA has a number of activities at the regional level in Latin America, Central America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

That is because renewables work better when connected in a larger manner with a diversity of sources. Wind power in one country can complement solar power in another, and both can be supported by hydropower in a third.

This is very much the case, for example, in Africa, which varies significantly from country to country in its renewable resources.

That is why IRENA helped broker a landmark announcement last September to create a clean energy corridor from the Cape to Cairo, connecting power pools across the continent and creating a regional market for regional electricity trade. Similar initiatives are being considered for Central America and Central Asia, and can be powerful attractors for new investment.

CONCLUSION

There are many more examples I could give. Before overall, I am confident that renewable energy offers a viable solution that can curb CO2 emissions, stimulate our economies, produce millions of jobs, expand access to modern energy, improve health, and enhance our security all at the same time – as long as we do the right things to make it happen.

It's a win-win for us all, and the message is catching on.

But because of this success, vested interests, especially in the fossil energy space, are lining up to halt further progress, and the proponents of business as usual are ramping up their rhetoric.

That is why I ask you to help us to accelerate the change.

Without the support of legislators, we will be unable to turn the tide. National parliaments are the key to turning this situation around, and IRENA stands ready to help you make that happen.

We are very much looking forward to welcoming a number of you to our fifth Assembly in January, where we hope to continue this conversation.

So let's make sure we come together and do the right thing, and embrace the extraordinary opportunities the renewable revolution has to offer.

Thank you.