

Role of Regional Cooperation for Asia-Pacific's Energy Transition in the COVID-19 Era

In his closing remarks at the 2019 United Nations (UN) Climate Action Summit, UN Secretary-General António Guterres committed the UN Secretariat to slashing its carbon emissions and dramatically increasing its use of renewable energy by 80% till 2030. This is an important step forward for the UN to lead by example, and champion efforts to tackle climate change through its internal goals for reducing emissions and scaling up the transition towards clean energy.

The broader vision adopted by the global community through adoption of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda with its dedicated goal on energy, places strong emphasis on shifting the global energy system to use more renewable energy, enhancing energy efficiency, increasing access to modern energy and a rapid reduction in global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. To accelerate this energy transition, the UN system and other multilateral agencies endeavour to provide the necessary knowledge, tools and support to Member States as they move towards a low carbon future based on sustainable energy. Key global UN processes such as the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; and the Sustainable Energy for All initiative have been established to lay the foundation for resilient, low-emission economies and societies around the world.

The UN has emphasised the importance of committing to net-zero emissions by 2050 in national climate plans in order to meet the 2-degree warming limit under the Paris Agreement. As part of this effort, the UN has stressed that there is no place for fossil fuels in national COVID-19 recovery plans, encouraged the use of carbon pricing and advocated a halt to constructing new coal-fired power stations. The UN, along with other multilateral organisations and regional associations, can play an important role to drive sustainable energy transition, including knowledge sharing and raising awareness with successful strategies and approaches to better technological, policy and financial options, capacity building and enhancing regional cooperation. Financing is a key component of the transition and in this context the role of multilateral development banks and other financial institutions is central.

The Asia-Pacific region, with its large and rapidly growing energy demand is central to the success of the global transition to sustainable energy. In addition, the Asia-Pacific is home to many vulnerable people without access to modern energy – some 200 million people without access to electricity and 1.2 billion people without access to clean cooking fuels and technologies. Addressing these gaps through SDG7 is intrinsic to the core promise of the 2030 Agenda to ‘leave no-one behind’. In the Asia-Pacific, the UN has been assisting member countries in long-term energy planning in order to reach the targets set out in SDG7 using scenario modelling of energy systems to guide decisions on investment and energy policies.

From early 2020, COVID-19 has impacted the world with huge health, economic and societal consequences which are still unfolding. The long-term impact of the pandemic on energy transition is still being assessed. It remains to be seen if the focus on fighting COVID-19 will redirect efforts away from sustainable energy or whether in fact, there can be integrated solutions developed that

address both the COVID-19 response and recovery as well as energy transition. Hence, in the current circumstances, it becomes imperative to highlight the collective role of different UN agencies to translate its vision into reality, in facilitating clean energy transition in the Asia-Pacific region. This session will, therefore, address the following key questions:

- How could regional cooperation, supported by the UN and other international agencies, accelerate energy transition in the Asia-Pacific region?
- The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for renewables and decarbonisation. How can investments in the energy system drive the way for equitable, inclusive and resilient economies? How can we accelerate the pace of change and enable policy and community-based solutions to realise an inclusive low carbon economy?

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