



Statement by

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Distinguished Participants, Dear Colleagues, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 31st Session of the Committee on Sustainable Energy with its focal theme: Energy Security, Resilience and Net Zero: Tangible Actions to Deliver a Sustainable Energy Future. I very much regret that I cannot be with you in person.

At UNECE, our mission is to promote regional economic integration. The region is one of the largest producers and consumers of energy. It has the most extensive trade flows for energy-related services. Our region is key when it comes to energy and delivering a sustainable energy future for our world.

We are at a critical turning point. Our region has become the focus of geopolitical conflicts and extreme climate events - heatwaves, forest fires and floods. The third policy brief of the UN Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance issued in August focused on the global impact of the energy crisis. It contains some stark messages: "more people are now forecast to be pushed into food insecurity and extreme poverty by the end of 2022." Further, "the world is in the grip of a major energy crisis."

The brief also states: "There are growing fears of a looming economic slowdown that, coupled with high inflation, might imply a return to stagflation at the end of 2022 or in 2023".

Unless we decide on a balanced and integrated approach to solving these multiple crises, we are on a trajectory to jeopardize the well-being of societies and the planet's future. I firmly believe that collectively we can change that trajectory.

I call upon all the distinguished participants present today to pause and think about the energy, food and climate crises unfolding before us. How can UNECE and the Committee on Sustainable Energy be that instrument of change that can bring us back from the verge of multiple disasters?

Energy is critical to supporting peace, cooperation, sustainability, and quality of life in our region and beyond. Experts have found clear pathways for policymakers to attain a carbon-neutral energy system. Energy efficiency improvements, renewable energy deployment, high-efficiency fossil fuel technologies with carbon capture, use, and storage (CCUS), nuclear power (including advanced nuclear power), hydrogen and integrated and sustainable management of natural resources are all part of the solution to attain carbon neutrality. Only bold, immediate, and sustained action can develop resilient energy systems that ensure affordable access to energy AND decarbonize our energy systems in time to avoid a climate disaster.

Private and public sector cooperation is essential. Collaboration with the financial sector to drive low-carbon energy investments is also vital, and that collaboration must be agile.

The Committee has been at the forefront of dialogue and action to support its member States on the energy transition. Diverse standards, guidelines and best practices developed by the Committee through its six expert groups have set the trend. Our tools have been widely adopted in the region and beyond.

Just last week we issued our UNECE Renewable Energy Regional Status Report jointly with REN21. I encourage you all to read it. This report also rings many alarm bells. Breakthrough growth in renewables in South-East and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia needs to be rapidly accelerated to end fossil dependency and boost energy security.

Public and private investment in renewables in this part of our region remains modest compared to global growth trends. This should not be the case.

With the UN climate talks (COP27) only a few weeks away, countries and investors in the UNECE region must urgently redouble their commitments to deploy renewables to achieve global net zero targets and end fossil fuel dependency. Scaling up investment in renewables is crucial to strengthen energy security and affordability.

Digital solutions can also help us navigate the global energy crisis. What we need is a mix of short-, medium- and long-term solutions, combined with conventional and innovative transformation to optimize efficiency while building resilience and security. It is imperative that we curb energy demand. If we focus only on strategies to curb supply while demand remains high or higher than it currently is, this is a recipe for a further crisis.

UNECE recently issued a number of documents that discuss the opportunities and benefits of digitalizing electricity systems, make recommendations on policies to accelerate that transformation, and ways to overcome barriers to energy digitalization. Customer behaviour and decision-making, empowered by access to data, remain key. You will hear more about this later this morning. Our Commission session next April will focus on digitalization and green transformation towards sustainable development in the UNECE region. This Committee has a strong contribution to make.

I urge the Committee to rise to the new challenges and develop more breakthrough solutions to accelerate urgent action on climate and build the needed resiliency of our energy systems.

I wish you a very successful event and discussion and look forward to hearing about the outcomes.
