

Keynote Address
Seventh IEA-IEF-OPEC Symposium on Energy Outlooks

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 15 February 2017

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Under Secretary General of the United Nations and the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia the Pacific, I would like to convey her sincere thanks to the organisers for the invitation to address the 7th IEA-IEF-OPEC Symposium on Energy Outlooks.

The theme of this Symposium on energy outlooks holds great relevance for a world facing a complex and challenging energy future. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, or ESCAP, is cooperating with its 53 member States across the Asia-Pacific region on regional energy challenges. Our region, like many other regions of the world, is working towards an energy future that brings sufficiency, security, affordability and access to modern energy for all. Also, to deliver on the promise of the Paris Agreement, we need to bring about an energy transition to low carbon sources over the coming decades. In the medium term, by 2030, we must succeed in delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals which includes targets for achieving universal energy access and dramatically increasing the contribution of renewable energy and energy efficiency to the global energy system.

Against this backdrop of multiple objectives, and ongoing uncertainty and variability, energy scenarios play a vital role in understanding how energy resources and technologies will respond to changes in the global environment. They inform the policy, investment and consumption choices we make and help prepare us for the future. Importantly, they often warn us of the unacceptable consequences of pursuing business as usual. At the same time, they may be controversial and can attract criticism from some quarters. It is true that this criticism often misses the core purpose of constructing these outlooks and scenarios. Their purpose is not to predict the future, which is impossible, but to guide our choices and help us understand the range of responses and impacts of an extraordinarily complex system. However it is also important to understand alternative viewpoints to ensure energy outlooks are continuously improved.

This task is becoming more difficult as new technologies enter the energy space and enter into a phase of dynamic growth. On the generation side, there is growth in solar and wind power, while on the consumption side energy storage, advanced efficiency of fossil fuels and electric vehicles can rapidly shift the assumptions used.

Adding to the complexity of developing energy outlooks is the growing bottom-up influence in many markets with the growth of distributed energy, often from renewable sources. These developments, while positive, also introduce fresh challenges for deriving future energy scenarios.

The Asia-Pacific region, and the world more broadly, is at a turning point in its energy trajectory. The energy solutions that have fuelled growth in the region over the past few decades are no longer compatible with the sustainable development aspirations of the global community. In transitioning to a new era of sustainable energy, policymakers across the region face complex decisions. The role of energy outlooks in supporting decision-making is greater than perhaps ever before. Dialogue between policymakers and the developers of energy outlooks, such as the IEA, is critical to enhance understanding and to ensure continuous improvement.

As the most comprehensive intergovernmental platform on sustainable energy in the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP will work with its member States to promote sustainable energy development; and looks forward to engaging more with international organizations such as IEF, IEA and OPEC. I hope that together we can develop enhanced dialogue and cooperation to support these important endeavours.

Thank you.