

## IRENA HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 4 APRIL 2011

On Monday, 4 April, the Assembly of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) held its inaugural session.

### REPORT OF THE ASSEMBLY

**OPENING OF THE SESSION AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK:** The Assembly elected by acclamation Sultan Al Jaber (UAE) as President. A minute of silence was observed for the victims of disasters. The Assembly adopted: the provisional agenda (A/1/L.1/Rev.1); rules of procedure (A1/DC/L.1); and participation of observers (A/1/DC/L.2).

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS:** Conrod Hunte (Antigua and Barbuda), Stephen Motsa (Swaziland), Benedikt Høskuldsson (Iceland), and Alexander Mikhalevich (Belarus) were elected as vice-presidents, and Abubakar Sani Sambo (Nigeria) as rapporteur. The Credentials Committee was appointed, consisting of Bangladesh, Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, the Gambia, Iceland, Norway, India, Swaziland and UAE. GERMANY put forward the designation of Abu Dhabi, UAE, as the permanent seat of IRENA (A/1/DC/L.11), which was adopted by acclamation.

**APPOINTMENT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL:** Adnan Amin (Kenya) was sworn in as Director-General for a term of four years (A1/DC/L.12). Amin accepted the post "with humility and a great sense of responsibility," highlighting his trust that IRENA will meet the expectations of the international community. The UAE congratulated the members of IRENA on electing its first Director-General, and thanked Amin for his work thus far in bringing IRENA on the "right track."

**HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT:** The session, held in the morning and afternoon, was attended by one Head of State, over 50 ministers, 30 ministerial-level representatives, and Heads of UN agencies and intergovernmental organizations. Participants addressed issues such as development and energy access, the role and governance of IRENA, climate change and national experiences.

Amin thanked the UAE and Germany for their instrumental roles in bringing IRENA to life, noting that renewable energy is "essential and inescapable for the survival of our endangered planet."

Lord Tu'iavakano, Prime Minister, TONGA, said IRENA must be innovative and take a leading role in a multilateral approach to deal with renewable energy, and not to pursue the example of international financial and donor institutions, which have not often positively impacted development.

Most delegates thanked the UAE for hosting the meeting, noting its generous hospitality. Many delegations expressed their condolences to Japan regarding the recent natural and nuclear disasters.

Numerous countries, including INDIA, TONGA, GERMANY, IRAQ and UAE outlined national efforts to promote the use of renewable energy. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA highlighted the Global Green Growth Initiative. ECUADOR mentioned the foregoing of oil exploration in the Yasuni National Park. MALAYSIA highlighted initiatives for the scaling up of solar energy and the promotion of biodiesel. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA congratulated UAE on the development of Masdar City and called for the exchange of best practices. MARSHALL ISLANDS encouraged IRENA to use his country as a place to conduct research on energy access and efficiency in vulnerable areas. TURKEY and AUSTRALIA indicated their willingness to share their experiences and best practices with the international community.

BANGLADESH, SAMOA and others identified high investment costs and lack of access to technology as significant barriers to renewable energy uptake. SIERRA LEONE underscored his country's hopes that renewables will help hasten economic development and welcomed IRENA as a facilitator. SPAIN stressed technology transfer for development, and the need to involve industry.

SOUTH AFRICA said the international community needs IRENA's support to illustrate the role renewables can play in providing baseload energy capacity, as well as in eradicating energy poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). CHAD highlighted that the MDGs cannot be achieved without advancement on energy issues, and, in developing countries, energy issues cannot be addressed without assistance from organizations such as IRENA. The African Union (AU) said energy is one of Africa's largest infrastructural problems, and described AU's efforts to address this challenge through the development of renewables. KUWAIT expressed hope that IRENA would help bridge the gap between developed and developing countries by working to enable investment, improve price competitiveness of renewables, and support small- and medium-sized enterprises. SWEDEN said IRENA should work as a link between developing and developed countries.

Many countries underscored the importance of energy access. SRI LANKA indicated the goal to provide electricity access to 100% of its population by 2012. INDIA announced his country is hosting an international conference on improving energy access. UNIDO, for UN-ENERGY and UNEP underscored the social and health aspects of energy poverty. FRANCE said IRENA must participate in formulating and developing models to address energy access and energy poverty challenges, and

invited IRENA to participate in the Paris-Nairobi Climate Initiative. In a video message, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon underscored the importance of IRENA for the UN's 2012 International Year of Sustainable Energy for All. MALI noted his country's difficulty in meeting the energy needs of its people and welcomed intense cooperation with IRENA to improve energy poverty.

JAPAN said IRENA should: be a center for excellence for innovation, not a development assistance body; have a lean and efficient secretariat; and work on outreach. GERMANY called on IRENA to highlight the advantages of renewable energy for sustainable development, meet rising energy demands, and steer away from energy dependency. SWEDEN and SPAIN underscored the importance of practical work and action. UAE looked forward to IRENA becoming an international center for renewable energy excellence and to identify suitable markets.

MONGOLIA welcomed IRENA's role as a knowledge facilitator to assist countries in realizing their renewable energy goals. FINLAND indicated it expects fast and concrete results from IRENA's work, and movement towards a recognition as a center of excellence. POLAND welcomed IRENA as a platform for sharing experiences and knowledge, and said IRENA's 2011 Work Programme will ensure IRENA's successful institutional growth. UGANDA hoped IRENA would be a vehicle for the dissemination of information and best practices. MOROCCO, TUNISIA and PAKISTAN said IRENA should become an effective dialogue instrument and promote partnerships.

PORTUGAL lauded the broad membership of IRENA, which he said gives it a strong mandate to aggressively move forward on its objectives, especially in assisting developing countries. MEXICO said IRENA should facilitate dialogues to lower barriers to renewable energy uptake, and work with international organizations and funds to enable universal access. ALGERIA called for IRENA to facilitate access to finance. CYPRUS highlighted the importance of renewable energy to achieve sustainable development, and IRENA's role to that end.

BELARUS called for a focus on technology cooperation, innovation and capacity building. MALDIVES said IRENA should facilitate access to existing contextually appropriate renewable energy technologies. SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE said IRENA should partner with industry to encourage the development of technologies appropriate for developing countries. ALGERIA, UGANDA and others called on IRENA to promote technology transfer. PAKISTAN and GRENADA added that IRENA should strive to bring down the costs of renewable energy technologies. MOROCCO, SUDAN, TUNISIA, TOGO and others reiterated their support for the creation of a technical committee to provide assistance to developing countries.

KIRIBATI called for IRENA to facilitate access to practical forms of renewable energy technologies. FIJI welcomed the focus on the Pacific region in IRENA's work programme. GRENADA said IRENA should not become a "bazaar" for developed countries to sell expensive and inappropriate technology. ZIMBABWE stressed the need for capacity building.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA underlined that fossil fuel depletion and climate change call for a paradigm shift towards green growth and renewable energy. SAMOA, GRENADA, KIRIBATI and FIJI said addressing climate change is a matter of survival for small island developing States, stressing the need for access to affordable renewable energy. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stressed renewables for climate change mitigation, calling for the dissemination of the findings of its upcoming Special Report on Renewable Energy Sources and Climate Change Mitigation. ALGERIA underscored the

vulnerability of Africa to climate change and, together with PERU, identified the deployment of renewable energies as one solution.

SPAIN called for a focus on renewable energy in the transport sector, noting its importance for energy independence.

ECUADOR, with NICARAGUA, called for representation of three Latin America and the Caribbean countries on IRENA's Council. ROMANIA urged a quick shift from solving institutional issues to forming a strategic plan to achieve practical aims.

The GAMBIA, MARSHALL ISLANDS and SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE supported the granting of IRENA observer status to Taiwan. The GAMBIA said IRENA's success will be a measure of its members' active participation. ISRAEL said renewable energy is not a luxury, stressing that renewables can free societies from the dependencies associated with fossil fuels. ARMENIA emphasized the importance of international cooperation for harnessing renewable energy potential. IRAN encouraged countries that have not yet fully acceded to IRENA to do so, to foster full participation of all members.

The US applauded the precedent set by IRENA in using merit to select its staff, and underscored the importance of IRENA working across technologies and sectors, and taking a non-top-down approach. Underscoring overuse of biomass resources due to booming energy demand and a growing population, TANZANIA said that renewable energy requires careful management.

KENYA called on IRENA and the UN to join forces to promote the use of renewable energy on a global scale. JAPAN called on IRENA to create synergies with other international institutions. UN-ENERGY pledged to act as a link between the UN system and IRENA.

President Al Jaber announced that the high level segment would be resumed in the morning and closed the session at 6:10pm.

### **IN THE CORRIDORS**

The corridors of the ADNEC center were full on Monday, as 50 ministers, 30 ministerial level representatives and the Heads of various UN and international agencies arrived for the first day of IRENA's existence. Many welcomed the high level of participation as proof of the interest and support for the Agency and renewable energy. However, a delegate joked "they are just checking out the new kid in town," in reference to the presence of UN chief executives and prominent diplomats.

Relieved that the Director-General's election was behind them, participants turned their discussions to substance, including the future focus of the Agency. Many participants seemed to agree on the need for IRENA to act as a catalyst to facilitate access to technology and finance. While some developing country representatives were discussing the importance of renewables and IRENA for development, some developed country participants were heard warning against IRENA becoming another development agency, or engaging in the traditional North-South and blocking dynamics prevalent within the UN.

Discussions also revolved around the selection of the Council, with delegates debating the prospects of reaching an agreement on Monday. One delegate was heard remarking she had not been consulted, saying, with a wink, "it's not necessarily a bad thing." Regional distribution of Council posts seemed to be an issue, with some delegates commenting about unclear selection procedures. Others noted the inadequacy of UN regions for IRENA, given its current membership and the fact that signatories were expected to ratify the IRENA statute promptly, thereby modifying IRENA's composition.