

Keynote Address by H.E. Amal Al Qubaisi, Speaker of the Federal National Council (FNC)

Your Excellency, Dr Thani Al Zeyoudi, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Dr Adnan Amin, Director-General of IRENA, your Excellencies, Honorable members of parliament, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Arab Emirates Federal National Council it is my great honor to welcome you all to Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, and also to be with you here today in this very important gathering, the second IRENA Legislators Forum. I was privileged also to be here on the first one.

This Forum is a testimonial to the critical role that legislators play in advancing and implementing the world's sustainability agenda. It serves as a platform for all of us to come together and speak with one voice on the necessity to develop a policy agenda and action plans to address our world's biggest challenges: climate change and resources scarcity.

I would like to sincerely thank Dr Adnan Amin and the IRENA Secretariat for their vision and for putting together this forum. It has been a delight to see how far IRENA has come in such a short period of time. IRENA is making a real difference on the world stage as measured by any standard. We are also pleased to see that they are a driving force to ensure that legislators will be associated to this change and to the difference we are making.

Ladies and Gentleman, as we all know, renewable energy is our planet's best hope for sustainability. From our significant investments in Masdar and all its thoughtful initiatives in clean energy and sustainability, to having a government's Ministry dedicated to climate change, the UAE is deeply committed to the principles that IRENA embodies.

Only a few days ago, the United Arab Emirates have announced its 2050 Energy Strategy, that aims to increase the proportion of renewable energy to 44% of the total energy mix of the United Arab Emirates. The energy strategy was developed to carefully balance between environmental and economic considerations. It identifies targets for clean energy, together with a three phase plan to achieve them, as to cut carbon emissions by 70% by 2050, to improve energy efficiency by 40% by also 2050, and, as I just mentioned, 44% of our energy should come from renewables, 6% will be coming from nuclear and 38% from gas, while 12% of UAE energy will come from clean fossil.

The cost of this aspiring and visionary strategy is around AED 600 billion over 33 years to build the infrastructure. It will be offset by the efficiency savings that will be more than AED 700 billion around that time. This is a very clever and smart investment in the future.

Indeed, as the UAE is not just planning for the next 5 to 10 years, but we are also planning for the next 50 years and beyond. Children in Kindergarden today will be in their late 50's in 2070, and with the increase of life expectancy, may very well be living in the 22nd century, and with a global population that may reach 11 billion people. We are talking about the children of today. Many of them are our children, the ones we know, we love and we cherish. What kind of a world we are leaving for them? Will they have the opportunities that are offered to us today? Or will they be left with more challenges than the ones we are facing today? Will they have the same resources that we are enjoying today? Or will they struggle to survive? This is what is at stake when we talk about sustainability. 50 years from now is not really as far away as we might think.

Even with the resources we have today, about 1/5th of the earth population does not have access to electricity. It is the energy that really lights up our world, and renewable energy will light up the future of humankind.

Over the past century and more, energy has been central to global economic growth. With diminishing resources, economists are predicting that economic growth over the next 50 years will be less than half of the growth the previous 50 years had. But if we plan correctly, renewable energy can serve as an engine for substantial future economic growth.

Dear colleagues, we, as parliamentarians, have a moral, ethical and practical responsibility, not only to support renewable energy, agreements and goals, but to ensure their full implementation through appropriate legislation and oversight. We must do so now, without any delay. And we must do so with actions and not just words.

As for the Federal National Council, we give great priority and also we feel highly responsible when it comes to the policies and the legislations related to energy, and we have participated hand in hand with our dynamic government in really foreseeing and trying to shape the future under the visionary leadership and the clear vision that we have for the United Arab Emirates, and how we can build an ecosystem for a sustainable future.

As we are actively working on these policies and legislations, we try also at the international level to ensure our participation. When it comes to budget and when it comes to the environment, we ensure to pay a great oversight and also play a legislative role, nationally. On the international level, and more specifically with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Federal National Council has always been working hand in hand and jointly in its different committees and also in its different roles and initiatives aside from legislation, in 2008, when the environmental policy was introduced with the IPU, and the second in 2016, as we have been working on with them hand in hand in endorsing a parliamentary action plan for climate change.

Moreover, as we realise our global parliamentary role, just a few weeks ago in mid-December, we have hosted the first Global Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament, under the patronage of H.H. Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak. This Summit gathered together leaders of parliament as women Speakers from all around the world with leaders from other government branches and also the private sector, civil society and youth, and mostly also scientists to recommend actionable initiatives that can address our planet's grand challenges and mega trends, including those pertaining to climate change, demographics and resources scarcity. The Summit concluded with the Abu Dhabi Declaration, that articulated the commitment of the participating parliaments to the implementation of clean energy and sustainability initiatives, all under the umbrella of the IPU, our co-organiser of this first Global Summit.

Let me read you the articles that really relates to what we are talking about today, since we are talking about actions and how we can come out with actions as legislators. The Abu Dhabi Declaration has stated in its fifth clause that we, the parliaments and the IPU, agree that as for climate change and resource scarcity our parliaments should promote ratification of the Paris Agreement and take all necessary measures to be implemented. They should implement the IPU parliamentary action on climate change. Parliaments must enact practical and appropriate legislation and establish regulatory frameworks to progressively reduce their nation's carbon footprints, whilst continuing to grow economically and create opportunities for all, including the most marginalized.

Through their legislative and oversight work, parliaments must promote the innovation, needed to provide clean energy on a massive scale. They must contribute to protecting and ensuring the rational use of natural resources. Parliaments must also consider that their legislation will protect natural habitat, biodiversity and the overall ecosystem. Internationally, parliaments need to also ensure funding for such projects.

As we are clearing this, and beside this, the Abu Dhabi Declaration articulates also an important action that calls on all parliaments to develop proper entities within each parliament to plan far into the future, accelerating climate change and linked resources will be prominent it on the agendas of these entities.

The discussions of the Summit included how our grand challenges are inter-dependent and inter-related. Transformative innovation and science, technology, socio-economic development and even geopolitical dynamics are all related and interwoven.

This is also true with the challenges we face into decarbonizing our economies and accelerating the adoption of renewable energy. We have to think holistically and develop an end-to-end strategy that balances a number of inter-related considerations. Research and Development, and innovation, standards, costs of implementation, impact on existing jobs and companies, education and rescaling, and the new employment and economic growth opportunities. We have to think of all of that.

Let me be also more clear, we have to accelerate the adoption of clean energy; we have no other choice. However, unless we develop a complete and holistic strategy, we will not achieve our goals.

Over the past few years we have witnessed key developments, including the COP21 Paris accords, and the adoption of the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The time has come for us in parliaments to take the leadership and begin to action these agreements and goals. To do so will require true partnerships between parliaments and other branches of government, key international organizations, such as IRENA, as well as the private sector. In fact, the role of the private sector is absolutely vital. Roughly, 40% of the Fortune 500 companies today have sustainable energy targets. This is a good sign, but we remain far from where we need to be. Parliaments can make a substantial difference through the enhancement and the enactment of legislation that not just serve as an incentive to the private sector, but actually make it truly attractive and profitable for companies to accelerate the adoption of clean energy. However, this kind of legislation must be part of a broader strategy that makes sense to all stakeholders.

The 2016 IRENA Legislators Forum was a great beginning and we made good progress in identifying the areas that we should focus on. One key outcome was our collective agreement that parliaments are the best vehicles to bring together all stakeholders. Indeed, this is exactly what we should do to develop the needed holistic strategy to deploy clean energy. Each one of our nations, has unique circumstances and considerations, but, dear colleagues, we all have a common threat related to the realities of climate change and scarcity of resources.

I wish that we can really take stand and invest on the opportunity given to us all today, and also with the agreements that we have reached through the Abu Dhabi Declaration, especially in the clause that are related to climate change and energy.

I wish you all a very successful forum and I'm confident that together we will conclude the day with actionable recommendations and begin to make tangible strides forward in the quest for ensuring a healthy planet for our children.

Again, I would like to thank you, Dr. Adnan, and thank IRENA as an organization for putting this forum together and coming hand in hand, working on this important consideration for the future of our present and future generations.

Dear colleagues, the time to act is now! Thank you all, thank you very much.