



UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All Official Launch at UN Headquarters

**Speech by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
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Secretary General
President of the General Assembly
Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

When we launch the UN Decade – Sustainable Energy for All, we are aware that our common journey is indeed visionary, inspired by the determination to give everyone a better life while preserving Mother Earth in her glorious beauty. Our methods will be pragmatic, based on proven technologies and the track-records of business successes and national achievements.

My presence here today bears witness to how one of the poorest nations in Europe, classified by the UNDP until the 1970s as a developing country has, in the lifetime of one generation, moved away from fossil fuel and transformed itself into a leading example of a clean-energy economy, drawing 100% of its electricity and heating from sustainable energy resources. The experience of Iceland proves beyond doubt that clean energy is a solid foundation for economic growth, profitable enterprises and thriving households and a front line of defense in times of financial crisis and commercial downturns.

It is a fascinating paradox that the sustainable energy achievements made in recent decades, primarily in the Western World, could, with the right policy and business frameworks, provide the developing countries with the keys to success.

In all categories of sustainable energy, the nations of the South enjoy a richer potential than those of the North and thus a new era of sustainable energy could make our century into a period of great progress for the developing world.

The success of the decade we launch here today will be strengthened by technological innovations which enable the scale of investments to be tailored to the needs. The excess capacity and huge initial investment costs inherent in the energy projects of the 20th century are now absent from the equation, because the tapping of solar, wind, geothermal and other sustainable energy sources can be adjusted to the needs of a few households, a small village, a growing town or emerging industrial projects. It can then be scaled upwards with each stage of successful development.

A few decades ago this important energy dimension was entirely absent from the formulation of economic strategies, simply because the technological development of sustainable energy supplies was still in its early stages. Now, however, countries can base their prosperity on proven technologies which can be tailored to every stage of development, to the needs of different regions, communities, enterprises or homes – and these technologies will become more and more viable and available as time goes on.

Although most countries are still in the early stages of this process, we are already witnessing dramatic examples of success all over the world. China has discovered how coal plants can be replaced by geothermal urban heating systems. Ethiopia has recently decided to build a 1000 MW geothermal power station, the largest in Africa.

The beauty of geothermal energy for economic and social development is that it is not just an energy resource. It can also be used to help rural areas by developing greenhouse agriculture and other types of profitable farming, including the drying of food products: fish, meat, fruit and vegetables. It provides the foundation for health spas and other tourist attractions and for urban and rural recreational and health centres, bringing lifestyle benefits to each and everyone.

Thus the transformation to this, and other forms of sustainable energy, creates multiple business opportunities for villages as well as advanced urban areas; it strengthens the foundations of national economies and enhances their competitiveness in the 21st century global economy.

I thank the Secretary General and the President of the World Bank for their visionary leadership and all of you for joining in this remarkable journey. It is a privilege and an honour to be with you on this historic occasion and thus offer the experience of my country as a significant example, helping others to realize that the transformation to a sustainable energy economy holds great promises of economic and social success.