

Fourteenth session of the assembly of the international renewable energy agency (irena)
AND RELATED MEETINGS,
17 TO 18 APRIL 2024, ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

ADDRESS BY H. E. MR. MD. GOLAM SARWAR, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

His Excellency Francesco La Camera,
Director-General of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA),
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalam-o-Alaikum and a very good morning to all of you!

It is indeed a great honour and a privilege for me to address the Inaugural Ceremony of the Fourteenth Session of the IRENA Assembly in this beautiful city of Abu Dhabi.

I thank His Excellency Francesco La Camera, Director General of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), for inviting me to the Fourteenth Session of the IRENA Assembly and for this opportunity to share SAARC's perspectives.

The presence of high dignitaries, heads of international and regional organizations, decision-makers, experts and stakeholders from public and private sectors signifies the importance of this Assembly. I convey warm greetings to all of you and wish you fruitful deliberations during the Assembly.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Launched in December 1985, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka as its members.

The main goals of the Association are to advance the welfare of the people of South Asia, enhance their standard of living, and contribute to the region's social, cultural, and economic advancement. Another significant goal of SAARC is to collaborate with regional and global organisations that have similar goals and objectives. The latter objective brings me to this Assembly.

Another big reason that brings me to this Assembly is that SAARC and IRENA are soon to enter into a collaborative arrangement through signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to bolster collaboration in the energy sector. In this context, I am happy to state that the recently concluded Session of the SAARC Programming Committee has approved the MoU for signature and we are in the process of completing some formalities to be able to do so in the near future.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Endowed with vast hydropower, natural gas, solar, wind and bio-fuel resources, South Asia offers tremendous potential for regional cooperation in energy generation, transmission and trade. Cognizant that energy is a cross-cutting issue not only in terms of development agenda but also in terms of its importance and impact on the daily lives of the people of South Asia, the SAARC Leaders institutionalized regional cooperation in energy in January 2000 with the identification of concepts, such as the SAARC Energy Ring, SAARC Market for Electricity (SAME), including the SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation, as well as formation of the Expert Groups for Oil and Gas, Renewable Energy, Electricity and Technology/Knowledge Sharing.

An important body that is specifically focused on cooperation in energy is the SAARC Energy Centre, which was created in 2005, as the Special Purpose Vehicle to realize the vision of the SAARC Leaders to establish an Energy Ring in South Asia. As the Centre of Excellence, the SAARC Energy Centre has been instrumental in initiating and coordinating SAARC programs in energy and to promote collaboration in specialized fields.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

SAARC, as one of the most populous regions and prone to climate and environmental challenges still has a long way ahead of itself for transition from traditional sources of energy to renewable energy. Most of the SAARC Member States primarily rely on energy sources derived from fossil fuels to power their economies. Furthermore, underutilization of resources, a limited focus on Renewable Energy (RE), excessive reliance on imported fuels, lack of inter-regional energy commerce, and lack of fuel diversification are additional issues that Member States face in the energy sector.

However, aiming to meet the targets of reducing emissions set in the Paris Agreement, the SAARC Member States have set their Nationally Determined Contributions and pledged to reduce carbon emissions. In this regard, all the Member States, albeit at differing rates of development, share the goal of lowering their reliance on fossil fuels and transitioning to more renewable energy through a quicker and more inclusive energy transition.

In the SAARC region, all Member States have introduced policies which aim to develop clean energy sources in their respective countries. These policies include the development of abundant hydropower resources, increasing the share of renewable energy in the grid, shifting the transport sector from fossil-fuel-based to Electric Vehicles, and limiting imported coal use.

In South Asia, renewable energy has far more promise than just producing electricity. It covers a broad spectrum of uses, such as tidal, geothermal, and bioenergy, each of which presents unique opportunities for innovation and sustainable growth.

Furthermore, the goal of renewable energy is to uplift communities and change lives, not merely produce electricity. It is about giving millions of people—especially in rural and isolated areas which do not yet have access to electricity—clean, affordable, and dependable energy.

Renewable energy has many advantages. It promotes social inclusion and economic progress by generating jobs at every stage of the value chain, from installation and production to operation and maintenance. It lessens our reliance on fossil fuels, lowering the hazards brought on by unstable energy pricing and unstable geopolitics. Additionally, it aids in the fight against climate change, preserving our planet for the next generations.

Nonetheless, to fully capitalise on the potential of renewable energy in South Asia, coordinated efforts and multifaceted actions are needed. It demands bold leadership, innovative financing mechanisms, encouraging laws, and strong institutional frameworks. It also requires active collaboration and partnership among the governments, private sector, civil society, and international organizations.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

As we embark on this journey towards a clean energy future, let us seize the opportunities that renewable energy presents to us. Let us harness the power of the sun, the wind, and the water to drive sustainable development, promote economic prosperity, and preserve our planet's precious resources.

Together, we can build a brighter, greener future for our planet—one powered by clean and renewable energy. The time for action is now, and the stakes could not be higher due to the unique threats and challenges of climate change, population growth, and energy scarcity. Let us rise to the challenge and use our collective wisdom to embrace the transformative potential of renewable energy with courage, determination, and optimism.

I am confident that the participation of high dignitaries, experts, representatives from public and private sectors and youth, and other stakeholders in this very important event organized by IRENA would lead to meaningful discussions, exchange of ideas and fruitful outcomes for a clear vision and prioritization of our future actions.

In conclusion, I would like to state that the quality of our prosperity and well-being in future depends on our collective vision and well-calculated actions at present. I see this gathering as an excellent example of collective ambition and initiative in achieving that end.

I wish the Assembly every success.

Thank you.
