

# IRENA: A pillar of clean energy supply

We are laying the foundation today

Redner/in: Federal Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel  
Anlass: Founding Conference of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)  
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Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted that we are meeting here today to lay an important foundation for sustainable energy supply.

We met in this very room five years ago to address the issue of renewables when Germany hosted the International Conference for Renewable Energies, renewables 2004. The conference triggered huge political innovation and a race to produce new and more efficient technologies; it established networks and strengthened international cooperation.

The time has now come, with the founding of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), to press ahead with the expansion of renewable energies in an even more comprehensive and targeted way. IRENA is therefore:

- An expression of our conviction that in future we can cover the main share of our energy consumption with renewable energies.
- An expression of our awareness that renewable energies offer huge potential and that the technologies for their use are available. But also of our recognition that there are obstacles blocking the rapid expansion of renewable energies and that we have to join forces to overcome them.
- An expression of our common commitment to international cooperation and our firm intention to develop and steer processes together.

In November 2008 the International Energy Agency once again warned that we are on course for disaster with our current wasteful use of energy. If we carry on this way, the Earth's temperature will increase by 5 or 6°C as a result of greenhouse gases from fossil fuels. Such a temperature increase would destroy the Earth as we know it. The IPCC has outlined the impacts we can expect: droughts will lead to further food shortages, extreme weather events such as more frequent hurricanes will leave trails of destruction, and rising sea levels will be a threat to almost 700 million people living less than one metre above sea level.

Lord Nicholas Stern has clearly demonstrated that business as usual will cause massive damage to our economies and societies. Business as usual is a much more expensive option than targeted investment today in climate-friendly technologies - such as renewable energy technologies.

But merely being aware of the threat to the environment, economy and peace is not enough.

The international community has to act. We have to recognise the political and economic opportunities. We have to adopt an ambitious follow-up agreement to the Kyoto Protocol in Copenhagen. We have to specify challenging reduction targets in order to launch a global transformation of energy systems towards a low-carbon society.

Germany has set itself the target of reducing its emissions by 40 percent by 2020. To achieve this goal we are focusing on a two-track strategy: expanding renewable energy use and reducing energy consumption through energy efficiency measures. For example, we want to double the share of renewables in electricity production from the current 15 percent to more than 30 percent in 2020.

There is such great potential in solar, wind and hydropower, geothermal energy and biomass that they can cover the energy needs of a global population rising to over 9 billion people. Furthermore, their use can be decentralised, thus bringing energy and development opportunities to isolated regions.

Due to technological advances, renewable energies are often already a competitive alternative to conventional energy sources. And what's more, technological progress means they are cheaper from year to year. Renewables are developing into an important economic sector. In 2008 over 150 billion dollars were invested in renewable energies worldwide. In Germany alone, 250,000 people already work in this sector.

The foundation of IRENA aims to promote the expansion of renewable energies internationally. By being here today you are demonstrating your willingness, and for some your determination, to be involved - and together we are stronger and quicker. I would like to warmly thank you for your trust and support in the founding of IRENA.

IRENA will help to remove the many obstacles which up to now have delayed the rapid expansion of renewables. The market is still distorted by subsidies for conventional energies; technological know-how is inadequate, information is not always correct.

IRENA will give concrete advice to both industrialised and developing countries to aid their introduction of political and legal frameworks. The goal is to create the right incentives and securities for investment. This needs to be steered by governments, since a distorted market is not capable of initiating the transformation of energy systems.

IRENA will act as a catalyst to facilitate technology and knowledge transfer, and to support capacity building. Using positive examples, the Agency will clear away deep-rooted concerns. Denmark generates more than 20 percent of its electricity from wind - so why shouldn't other countries also be able to feed large, varying quantities of electricity into the grid using intelligent systems? Large-scale solar thermal power plants are being built in Spain - so why not build some in the countries of North Africa too? And why shouldn't North Africa be able to sell its renewable electricity, as one of many export goods, to Northern Europe, where sunshine is in short supply? Kenya operates Africa's largest geothermal power plant, generating 12 percent of total renewable electricity - so why shouldn't we use this base-load capable energy source to bolster power supply in other geologically suitable sites? There can be only one answer: yes we can!

IRENA will be an international platform for renewable energies. It will focus more resources on renewable energies than any other organisation to date. But others need not worry - there is

more than enough work for everyone. IRENA will cooperate with other organisations and institutions to exploit synergies.

With IRENA we are laying the foundation for an energy supply which takes equal account of the three principles of sustainability – social, ecological and economic aspects. Today we are concluding the preparatory process and commencing the establishment of the Agency. Today, we will found IRENA!

Thank you very much.

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