



PRESS RELEASE

Abu Dhabi meeting raises energy and climate ambition in advance of Habitat III Conference

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Massive deployment of low-carbon energy in the world's cities is now both vital and economic, a high-level United Nations (UN) meeting concluded today at Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week. Hosted by the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), and the Habitat III Secretariat, the meeting sets the agenda for October's United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (known as Habitat III), the third in a series of UN summits held only once every 20 years on sustainable urbanization. The thematic meeting in Abu Dhabi recommended a number of policy, technology, and financing commitments in the format of a final declaration, covering energy sectors like electricity generation, building and appliance codes, transport, heating and cooling, and waste-to-energy.

"We have long known that cities are the most critical arena for climate action, and that energy is the underpinning factor," said Ambassador Thani Al Zeyoudi, the Director of Energy and Climate Change at the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "But what we are seeing today is a major shift in the cost equation. Energy policy measures we have taken in UAE cities – like encouragement of rooftop solar and mandatory green building codes – are no longer just environmentally responsible, they are now financially attractive."

The Abu Dhabi meeting occurs against the backdrop of last year's landmark Paris agreement on climate change, as well as the UN's adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, which call for universal access to energy and set new global targets on renewable energy and energy efficiency. Urban areas form the critical link between the two global efforts, as they represent over 70% of global energy consumption and an equivalent amount of energy-related CO₂ emissions. Dramatic cost reductions in low-carbon energy – like an 80% decline in solar photovoltaic costs in the last 5 years – are widely cited as one of the promising changes in the urban landscape since Habitat II in 1996 that can deliver major carbon and economic gains.

"Paris and the SDGs have set a vision on energy and climate, and we now need a sharp focus on the specific policies, financing models, and technologies that will get us across the line," said Adnan Amin, Director-General of IRENA. "The meeting today provides both an expert and early political consensus on what is feasible for cities, setting quantitative sector-specific ambitions based on this decade's breakthroughs in renewable energy and low-carbon





technologies. This is exactly the kind of practical, market-driven outlook the climate agenda requires.”

At the meeting, ministers, national and city government officials, researchers, private sector and other civil society representatives reviewed each major energy sector and debated what scale of change could realistically be achieved on the road to enactment of the Paris agreement in 2020 and the expiration of the SDGs in 2030. Case studies – from London, Lyon, and China’s Vanke, the world’s largest real estate developer – provided additional context.

“Habitat III must be a turning point in the way cities use and consume energy,” said Dr. Joan Clos, Secretary General of the Habitat III Conference. “Today’s meeting in Abu Dhabi provides an outline for the transition to sustainable energy in cities, backed by a clear business case, in the path towards a New Urban Agenda. Our priority must be educating urban stakeholders about the new market opportunities they have, while helping them to meet the right suppliers, advisors, and investors to realize their energy and climate goals.” Dr. Clos emphasized the great and urgent need to include local authorities in the generation, distribution and consumption of energy, particularly because climate agreements will be incredibly difficult to achieve without integrating local and municipal authorities in decision making.

Habitat III will take place 17-20 October 2016 in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, and is expected to be one of the most significant international events of the year. In the lead-up to the summit, the UN is organizing regional and thematic meetings to develop the agenda, with a focus on potential commitments. The meeting in Abu Dhabi, considered as the Habitat III Thematic Meeting on Sustainable Energy and Cities, marks the official preparation on urban energy. In addition, during this week an online consultation on the topic -held in the official Habitat III site- is contributing to the discussion.

Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week was selected as the world's largest annual gathering on clean energy and water, with over 30,000 delegates from some 160 countries, hosted by Masdar, Abu Dhabi’s clean energy company. Sustainability Week also includes the General Assembly of IRENA.

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