

# North American Student Energy Summit

[Opening Ceremony: Keynote Address]

19 June 2014

Mr. John F. Prato, Consul General of Canada,

Ms. Melanie Kenderdine, Director of Energy Policy and Systems Analysis at  
the U.S. Department of Energy,

Distinguished Guests,

Dear Students,

First of all, let me express my sincere gratitude to the *North American Student Energy Summit* for convening this forum. It is my great honour and privilege to deliver these remarks on behalf of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi, who unfortunately cannot be with us tonight as he is currently on his way back from an official visit to Pakistan. He did specifically ask me, however, to let you know that he is giving his full support to this initiative, and extends his sincere gratitude to the organizers,

including to Sean Collins, with whom he shared a panel earlier this month during the SE4All Forum.

The next ten years will decide a lot.

During the next ten years, we need to put our societies on a more sustainable path, not least in an area as central as energy. And you – the students of today and leaders of tomorrow – will play a key role in influencing *how* we do this.

I am sure that you are already starting to think about what your own professional lives might look like. And the first years following graduation are often decisive in shaping our careers.

In your instance, these years will coincide with United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, from 2014-2024. This stems from a decision by all 193 countries of the United Nations General Assembly.

**It is my profound honour and pleasure to formally launch this Decade for the student community here today. It gives me great hope to think about what this creative, resourceful, and inspired audience can do over these ten years.**

**Now it is up to all of us to fill the Decade with content, and to make it count.**

**Whether we are talking about solar or hydro-power, bio-energy or geothermal, sustainable energy not only helps in protecting our environment, but it is a space in which we can explore employment opportunities for youth. And we know that we need more jobs; in fact, in the next 15 years or so, we will need to create some 600 million new jobs, only to keep up with population growth, according to ILO estimates. And many of the gaps in the field of sustainable energy can be filled by young people. Because young people bring the innovation and forward-thinking needed to meet the needs of the sustainable energy sector.**

**This is a chance for you to think about how you can shape your future careers around issues related to sustainable energy. This is a chance to make a commitment, to make your mark and to create a legacy. I don't mean to**

sound like a job coach, but what do you want to achieve in the next ten years? Where do you want to be?

One example of the kind of commitment I'm thinking of is the one stated on Student Energy's "I am part of a movement" cards. It reads as follows:

[and I quote] "I am committed to doing everything in my power to transition the world to a sustainable future. I am a change maker, an innovator and will fuel the future of energy". [end quote]

With this kind of commitment coming from all of you individually, together you – we – can achieve a lot.

The Decade is an opportunity to spread the word about the importance of sustainable energy for all. As we have heard, while we are meeting here in New York, similar Student Summits are taking place in Cape Town, Aberdeen, and Mexico City.

**I encourage you all to reach out and keep in touch with fellow students and youth across the globe. Build networks, expand friendships - and share your experiences.**

**Already great examples exist of work done by youth around the world in the field of sustainable energy, which have had great impacts on their communities. I would like to share just a few of these with you:**

**According to a case study on “Sustainable biomass power in Rural India,” local youth were trained in a biomass project which provided electricity to their community. Not only were they equipped with new skills, but they received employment and helped provide lighting and piped drinking supply to their village.**

**In Kenya, through the Kibera Community Youth Programme, youth brought their innovation to the Kibera slums, where they developed a ground-breaking way to bring light into homes by using a simple soda bottle.**

And more recently – in 2011 – students of Makerere University in Uganda developed and successfully test-drove the nation’s first electric car.

I don’t know if you have heard of Peter Thiel? He helped Elon Musk with *PayPal* some ten+ years ago, and eventually used some of the money he got from selling his share to help Mark Zuckerberg launch *Facebook*. Long story short, Peter Thiel might be the most successful technology investor in the world. His venture-capital investment firm has a motto that I like. It says “We wanted flying cars, instead we got 140 characters.” The bottom line is not to hate on Twitter or dismiss the revolutionary power of social media, but to dream big. Because when we do, the potential and capacities of youth – including in the area of sustainable energy – are limitless.

By engaging in sustainable development and by working in sustainable or renewable energies, youth have a direct hand in shaping their futures. You can live in a world you want because of the solutions you yourselves come up with.

**These kinds of initiatives will continue to happen around the world. Initiatives and activities which will engage governments, the private sector, the civil society, and international organizations.**

**I encourage you to use your own events, social media channels, and connections to let your friends and family know about the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All. And in this context, I want to mention the Secretary-General's Climate Summit, which will take place here in New York on 23 September. This summit will be a different kind of climate summit, aimed at catalyzing action – action by governments, business, finance, industry, and civil society in areas for new commitments and substantial, scalable, and replicable contributions.**

**If we are to make the transition that the world so desperately needs, everyone has to work together. And as the leaders of the future, there is no reason for you to wait. You can start leading the way today.**

**This Decade is your chance to seek new partners, projects, and actions. And I urge you to ask yourselves: Have you really explored all possibilities?**

**The Decade also gives an opportunity to share what is already happening. I encourage you to use this chance to share your inspirational stories and experiences. Maybe your action will inspire others?**

**We have already heard how many people around the world lack access to electricity. Add to that the 2.6 billion people who do not have access to clean and safe cooking facilities, and this is certainly a challenge. But it is also an opportunity – not least for each and every single one of those people that we are talking about.**

**For the privileged rest of us, it is a chance to create opportunities - for ourselves, and for others.**

**Energy is not just crucial in and of itself. Energy is at the core of addressing some of the biggest challenges of our time, such as poverty eradication and the curbing of climate change. Energy is an indispensable factor for sustained**



**economic growth, raised living standards, and for achieving a range of other fundamentally important development goals.**

**Many of us take it for granted, but modern energy services have the ability to change people's lives. New jobs are created. Children and students can study after dark. Clinics can store life-saving vaccines. Food is produced and conserved more effectively. Scarce water resources can be used in a better way. Street-lights make women safer. Cleaner cookstoves can save millions of lives every year, mainly women and children.**

**Innovative ideas like the ones mentioned, coming from young people, yield transformative results and create solutions to our pressing environmental problems.**

**Examples like these also serve as a testament to the power of young people, their will to protect their environments and serve their communities. However, we must continue to push for young people to engage more in the realm of sustainable energies and environmental protection.**

**We have to highlight the work young people are doing in sustainable energy and support them. We must be open to their ideas, because they are thinking about the environment in ways that generations past have not.**

**The United Nations realizes the importance of youth engagement and is making a concerted effort to involve youth in our work. We are always calling on young people for submissions, suggestions, and ideas on a wide variety of topics, including in energy. Not only are we working for youth, but we are working with youth on initiatives that will potentially have great impact, soon and far into the future.**

**Sustainable energy is an enabler of better lives.**

**Sustainable energy is an enabler of sustainable development.**

**Sustainable Energy for All has three targets, to be achieved by 2030:**

- **Ensure universal access to modern energy services**
- **Double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency, and**
- **Double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.**

**These are ambitious but achievable targets. We know that they are easier to achieve jointly than individually. They are compatible with the target of keeping the increase in global warming below 2 degrees Celsius as compared to pre-industrial levels. And it would have tremendous effects on people's daily lives around the globe.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**The next ten years will decide a lot, both for yourself and your own careers - and for the world as a whole. You will be the ones deciding where you go – and where you take the world. You as young people can mobilize and pool your efforts to call on your governments to endorse alternative energy solutions. The youth voice is not to be underestimated, nor should it be underutilized.**

**Let us use this Decade to make some commitments. Let us use this Decade to make a difference. And let us start doing it today.**

**I would like to thank you all again for the invitation and for organizing this event. This is an important conversation to have, which has only started. You have the power to materialize the world you want. Thank you.**