

Speech of Hermann Scheer, member of the German Parliament, at the Founding Conference of the International Renewable Energy Agency on 26. January 2009 in Bonn, Germany

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
fellow colleagues from the German Parliament,
dear friends of IRENA,

Today we inaugurated the milestone for the global move to renewable energy - a move made in a higher speed than ever before.

The famous cosmopolitan scientist Leonardo da Vinci once said: "The sun has never seen a shadow." Today the world's civilization is shadowed by numerous existential energy crises, which cumulate at the same time. You all know the key-words: declining reserves, increasing energy demand – and therefore running exhaustion, rising prices, economic restrictions, social tensions within societies and international tensions between countries. And besides and above all that: climate change, air and water pollution, dying forests and desertification.

People and their governments are aware of all this. but people do not like to hear those ticking time bombs; they have a desire for solutions. The most basic and widespread solution is the change to renewable energy.

It is time for this change because the world civilization is in a race against time in order to leave the shadows of the various energy crises. As an old African wisdom says, "turn your face to the sun and you will leave the shadow behind you."

One of the most important incentives of IRENA will be to overcome mental barriers. This is the prerequisite for overcoming the physical, economic and political barriers against renewable energy. For too many years the potential of renewable energy was denounced and underestimated, and too many responsible authorities were misinformed rather than informed about its real potential. Like a captain on a ship that

was sailing on the open sea without orientation and when all their water was consumed the captain cried, “water everywhere but no drop to drink.” - Everywhere is renewable energy but no technology to harvest. We have to activate the natural, the technical, the economic and above all the human potential.

Fertilized with insufficient information too many remained unable to see the light of renewable energy including the unique chance for renewing our economies, for cleaning over polluted cities, and for all the other benefits of a new energy security for all nations.

For too many years the perception that the change to renewable energies would be an uncarryable burden dominated talks. But nowadays more and more people and their governments have recognized that the future of world energy supply and demand comes with renewable energy. This creates new perspectives which are inspiration for human action.

IRENA becomes the anchor and facilitator for the activation of common international action towards renewable energy. Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come.

The new US president Barack Obama said in his inauguration speech six days ago, “we will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. All this we can do.” And he added to this, “now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions, who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short, for they have forgotten what can be achieved when imagination is joined to common purpose and necessity to courage. What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them, that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long, no longer apply”.

I have a well reasoned hope that the Obama administration will join the IRENA initiative very soon. Renewable sources of energy are everywhere on our planet, and we can and should apply it everywhere.

With always updated technological information about the state of the art of renewable energy technologies and its diversities of different applications, served by IRENA, we can open the minds and encourage governments and investors for renewable energy strategies. We have learned many lessons for best policy and industry practice, and the role of IRENA will be that all can share the best practice experiences and enrich this with their own new ideas. IRENA will be the common learning and inspiring centre of renewable energy excellence.

It will empower countries to play a role in the new technological revolution. The IT revolution started 30 years ago, and now the world has joined it. We are now at the beginning of the ET revolution with renewable energies and new ways to come to energy efficiency. With IRENA we have created a unified vision and collaborative environment to implement renewable energies in all countries. No one should wait for the leadership of others, each country who wants to advance renewable energies should be enabled to do so with their own means,

I see four general guidelines for Renewable Energy policies:

1.

Rapid action is indispensable. The time for paying lip service to renewable energies is over. An end to the game of “talking globally, postponing nationally” is well overdue. With IRENA we come to “common working for national acting”.

2.

Renewable energies are a common good. It is impossible to privatize wind and solar radiation. Using these energy forms leads to greater equality in the world economy.

3.

Renewable energy has manifold macro-economic benefits. The political aim and art is to transform the macroeconomic benefits into microeconomic incentives for investors and consumers.

4.

Renewable energy allows new economic calculations: avoiding fuel costs and environmental costs.

5.

The costs of conventional fuels will rise as their exhaustion draws closer, whilst the costs for renewable energies will drop as a result of further technological

improvement and mass production. We have now reached this watershed. What we do now for the promotion of renewable energies will lead to cheap and abundant energy for all people today and in the future.

It was a long way to IRENA, since EUROSOLAR submitted the first proposal for it in January 1990. I have personally campaigned internationally for it in many countries and at numerous conferences and with many political initiatives. Many doubted that it could happen. Very few believed that there would be enough supporters. But if you have a goal, you should not let yourself become frustrated by the many resistances. When things do not happen the conventional way, it is necessary to take unconventional paths, like Albert Einstein said, “the methods that caused our problems are not able to solve them.”

Let's start the work together for our one world. With the message: “Yes, we can solve the energy problem.”