

Policy Speech by Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono
Renewable Energy Diplomacy of Japan – Climate Change and Future Energy

The age of renewable energy

Today, we are welcoming a new era of renewable energy. This is an era in which we work to stop climate change and reverse its already damaging impact; in which we commit to keep our air clean; and in which we accelerate deployment of renewable energy so that lights can be turned on for the first time in remote areas. To reach the full potential of the renewable energy era, we – as an international community – must join forces.

You might think that the Japanese Foreign Minister is not in a position to make such claims, as Japan significantly lags behind the world in deployment of renewables. Yes, I am seriously concerned with our current situation. For too long, Japan has turned a blind eye to global trends, such as the dramatic decrease in the price of renewables and inevitable shift to decarbonisation in the face of climate change. Instead, we have prioritized keeping the status quo for fear of change. As a result, Japan currently sets a goal for renewable energy to account for 22 to 24% of our overall energy mix by 2030, which is a significantly low quantitative target – especially when you consider that today, renewable energy accounts for 24%, on average, of the total global energy mix. As Japanese Foreign Minister, I consider these circumstances lamentable.

Japan's shortcomings so far are the result of short-term and ad-hoc solutions, which have continuously missed the mark on world trends. Japan, indeed, has been trying to accelerate renewable energy deployment, by introducing the Feed-in Tariff plan in 2012. However, the plan has been operated rigidly and cost the Japanese public up to \$24 billion US Dollars, in 2017 – and these costs are expected to increase. Also, Japan has been slow to adopt measures that would allow us to benefit from the significant drop in the price of solar and wind power that has been observed elsewhere. For example, distributed power generation and heat utilization from renewable energy have also not been fully utilized. Bid pricing was only partly applied to our solar power sector just this last autumn. We know we need to figure out how to put policies in place that will allow us to lower the price of renewable energy, including an auction. Plus, we need bold investments and institutional reforms to enhance the transmission network and electric power exchange between regional utilities for the larger deployment of renewables.

Though this present situation in Japan may be troubling, I am grateful for the opportunity presented here in the IRENA Assembly to express Japan's determination to undertake renewable energy diplomacy with new ways of thinking; to grasp the global dynamics properly; and to implement coherent, long-term solutions that are aligned with global trends.

Japan's contribution to the world by technology and innovation

At the One Planet Summit in Paris last month, I committed that Japan will lead the world in this endeavour by engaging the power of our advanced technology and innovation. Allow me to share with you some of our advancement.

Let's take solar power or photovoltaic as an example. While dramatic price reductions for solar panels have accelerated their deployment all over the world, Japan intends to leverage its innovation leadership to drive this technology even further. For example, with regard to 'crystalline silicon photovoltaic,' which occupies more than 90% of the global photovoltaic market, compared to the global average efficiency of 14 to 16%, a Japanese company achieved the world's highest conversion efficiency of 26.6% on a cell basis and 24.4% on a module basis. Another Japanese company has achieved the world's highest efficiency for 'compound semiconductor photovoltaic,' which is used in devices for satellites and space stations. Japan is also leading the research and development of the new type of 'printable' photovoltaic cells that might bring even more dramatic cost reductions in the photovoltaic market.

Battery technology is critically important to reduce carbon emissions in the transport sector. In this field, I am delighted to share that a Japanese university developed a new 'all-solid-state battery,' which has an immense potential to expand mileage and make batteries safer. This battery has been recently put into practical use by a Japanese automaker with the cooperation of the university.

Striving to reach new horizons, we should not forget about the countries vulnerable to climate change. Climate change is an issue that affects the whole world, and thus, we all need to work together to end it. In this context, Japan has provided more than \$2 billion US dollars over the last five years to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy. Japan has also co-organised a series of seminars for small island states and African countries on further deployment of renewables. Since its inception in 2012, 9 seminars have taken place in several different locations, including Tokyo and Fiji, together with IRENA. In the area of geothermal power, the field where Japanese advanced steam-spot detection technology is

leading the world, we hosted and organized training programs in Japan last year, welcoming 34 participants from 10 African and Latin American countries. Japan has also supported the construction of geothermal power plants utilising Japanese technologies in countries such as Kenya. Furthermore, a number of Japanese engineers are engaged in surveys and provide various supports for geothermal-related technologies in Africa, Latin America and Indonesia.

The Fukushima Plan for a New Energy Society

Let me turn now to new energy technologies we are deploying in Japan. As you know, the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics will be convened in 2020. In preparation for these world events, Japan is implementing a plan to lead a new energy future from Fukushima, where a serious nuclear accident inflicted great damage not so long ago. It includes various plans to transport, store and utilize hydrogen produced in large scale by renewables, and it aims to provide hydrogen to fuel passenger vehicles and buses at the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in 2020. Fukushima reconstruction is rapidly moving forward, and it is a pioneering place to chart a future for renewable energy and hydrogen society. I am very delightful that tomorrow, at the workshop hosted by IRENA, Japan will introduce the progress of this plan at the World Future Energy Summit. Fukushima is a special region that is so much more than just a center for renewable energy. It is a region rich in beautiful nature, enticing food and splendid culture. I sincerely hope that people are not deterred by baseless negative rumors and that they instead visit Fukushima and indulge in its charms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is no doubt that the importance of renewable energy is rapidly increasing, and, accordingly, the role that IRENA plays is becoming more and more important. Under the excellent leadership of Director-General Mr. Adnan Amin, let me express my high appreciation for IRENA's contribution to address the issue of climate change and promotion of renewable energy. Japan strongly supports the activities of IRENA. Japan also looks forward to welcoming you to the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in 2020, with innovative e-mobilised public transportation powered by carbon-free hydrogen produced by renewable energy in Fukushima.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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