

2021 IRENA Youth Forum Report to the IRENA Eleventh Assembly

21 January 2021 – Virtual Edition

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to report back from the Second IRENA Youth Forum that took place on 14 January in a virtual setting on the side-lines of the eleventh session of the IRENA Assembly.

The Forum which coalesced outcomes of three thematic working groups hosted on 10 and 11 January 2021 was convened under the theme “Promoting an Inclusive and Just Energy Transition”, and offered young people from all around the world the opportunity to exchange their views and ideas with high-level representatives from international and institutional organisations on ways and steps to make the energy transition more inclusive and ensure equity and equality during and after the global energy transition.

The virtual meeting not only served as a necessary adaptation to our new normal in the midst of the pandemic but highlighted the readiness of young people to innovatively use technology to communicate and work effectively with peers around the world.

In light of our dual global crises of climate change and COVID-19, the Forum underscored how important clean energy is to achieve our fundamental right to a healthy society and planet. Inadequate access to energy is a barrier to ending the current pandemic as it affects the efficient and effective distribution of vaccines, at the same time the still-abundant use of fossil fuels continue to provoke millions of deaths and health effects through pollution and associated climate impacts. Access to clean energy through renewables is paramount and it is vital that organisations work together and engage young people, especially through initiatives such as the Health and Energy Platform for Action.

The energy transition also presents an opportunity to youth to apply their skills to take on new roles as energy professionals, decision makers, entrepreneurs, and leaders. However, this requires governments and industry to prioritise skill building for youth, women, and marginalised groups. Education serves as the foundation to continue to develop the necessary skills and governments must guide skills training to meet the needs of their societies such as transitioning to clean energy. For this reason, renewables studies should be an integral component of modern curricula.

This generation of young people has also proven to be innovative, entrepreneurial, and well-versed in technological knowhow. Considering the undoubtedly important role that young people have already played in solving challenges to advance the transition through entrepreneurship and innovation, governments should facilitate this further by helping local start-ups compete with international developers and providing micro-credits. Moreover, Energy Clubs, Climate/Energy Hackathons, Youth Energy Awards, Mentorships, Calls for proposals, Incubators and Accelerators are needed to support their development. Apprenticeships, internships, and entry level positions are needed to build skills through work experience.

The 2021 IRENA Youth Forum underscored that young people have recognised their role in the energy transition - the theme of last year’s inaugural event - taken action and mobilized as demonstrated by the geographic diversity of academic institutions, advocacy groups and start-ups represented at the Forum.

Young people require inclusion among decision makers, not tokenistically but in a way that makes full use of our voices and skills.

We ask and urge IRENA to continue to promote the IRENA Youth Forum as an inclusive platform, and a continuous and meaningful engagement of the new generation of decision makers that can develop plans and make recommendations for action considering its role as the lead intergovernmental organisation mandated to promote renewable energy and support countries in their energy transition,

In concluding, we wish to acknowledge and appreciate the youth engagement work that has been very well championed by IRENA, even at a time as this when a lot is not as it used to be. We are encouraged that an even bigger number of us was engaged this year and remain hopeful that it can only get bigger.

We are on the verge of global energy transformation, as young people, we are committed and look forward to continuing the work that is so central to the future of energy and its impact on global prosperity.

Thank you.

** The report of the outcomes from the 2021 IRENA Youth Forum was delivered to the 11th IRENA Session of the IRENA Assembly by Ms Kervelle Baird from Trinidad and Tobago.*