

IAEA's Grossi at COP 25: More nuclear power needed for clean energy transition



(Photo: J. Donovan/IAEA)

IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi, speaking at the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP25) on 11 December in Madrid, Spain, said greater use of low carbon nuclear power is needed to ensure the global transition to clean energy, including to back up variable renewables such as solar and wind.

The world is currently well off the mark from reaching the climate goals of the Paris Agreement. With around two thirds of the world's electricity still generated through the burning of fossil fuels, and despite growing investment in renewable energy sources, global emissions of greenhouse gases reached a record high last year.

Mr Grossi said greater deployment of a diverse mix of low carbon sources, such as hydro, wind and solar, as well as nuclear power and battery storage, will be needed to reverse that trend and put the world on track to meet climate goals.

“We should not see nuclear energy and renewables as being in competition with one another,” he said at a side event on Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7), on ensuring access to affordable and reliable energy. “We need to make use of all available sources of clean energy.”

Nuclear power plants produce virtually no greenhouse gas emissions or air pollutants during operation. They are also able to operate around the clock at near full capacity, while variable renewables require back-up power during their output gaps.

“Nuclear power offers a steady, reliable supply of electricity,” Mr Grossi stated. “It can provide continuous, low carbon power to back up the increasing use of renewables. It can be the key that unlocks their potential by providing flexible support — day or night, rain or shine.”

He also spoke of the role of nuclear applications that help countries adapt to the consequences of climate change that are already apparent. “Our scientists help countries to develop new varieties of rice and barley that are tolerant of drought, extreme temperatures and salinity,” he said. “We support the use of nuclear techniques to identify and manage limited water resources.”

The United Nations side event, entitled “Accelerating the energy transformation in support of sustainable development and the Paris Agreement”, focused on initiatives that could have a significant impact towards achieving the SDG 7 goals, helping to close the energy access gap

in a sustainable way and promoting climate action by transitioning towards zero-carbon energy solutions.

The event was opened by remarks from Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Damilola Ogunbiyi, Chief Executive Officer of Sustainable Energy for All and Li Yong, Director General of the United Nations Industrial Organization (UNIDO).

Mr Grossi said nuclear power needs a place at the table where the world's energy future is decided, and that he was encouraged by his talks with other international organizations and their willingness to work with the IAEA towards a cleaner climate.

He underscored the symbolism of attending COP25 just one week after taking office.

“This reflects the importance of the issue and my firm belief that nuclear science and technology have an important role to play in helping the world to address the climate emergency,” he said. “That view is shared by many of the IAEA's 171 Member States.”

— *By Jeffrey Donovan*