

A Just Energy Transition is a Global Moment of Opportunity



GLOBAL RENEWABLES
CONGRESS

www.renewablescongress.org

by Lena Dente

We are in an era defined by conflict, climate turbulence, and deepening inequality. Yet, there are innovations, positive momentum and progress in the midst of the gloom. This week, UN Secretary-General António Guterres delivered a powerful speech, serving as a rallying call for the world: It's time to make a just energy transition a global priority, one that benefits both people and the planet and which is grounded in hope, progress, and justice.

His message was very clear: **The clean energy revolution is not a distant vision. It is in fact happening, and it is irreversible.** But if it is to succeed fully for the long term, it must be *fair, inclusive, and grounded in justice*. We want to take a closer look at his powerful call to action.

The clean energy shift is real and redefining global priorities

Citing recent IRENA data, the Secretary General highlighted that in 2024, global investment in clean energy reached over \$2 trillion, exceeding fossil fuel investments by \$800 billion. This trend represents a decisive economic pivot: solar and wind power now consistently outperform fossil fuels on cost. Over 90% of new renewable projects deliver electricity below the price of even the cheapest fossil alternatives.

This is more than a numbers game. It is indicative of a systemic, structural transformation. Clean energy has established itself as the more economically viable path, contributing 10% to global GDP growth in 2023 alone and generating nearly 35 million jobs worldwide.

As SG Guterres highlighted, the data send a clear signal. The trajectory of the global energy economy is shifting. Planning and policies must reflect the reality that renewables are not just environmentally essential; they are economically superior.

A transition that is not fair or fast enough

Despite the momentum, the transition is **not moving quickly enough**, and **it's not equitable**. OECD countries and China account for 80% of installed renewable power capacity.

By 2040, Africa could potentially generate 10 times more electricity than it needs coming entirely from renewables. Yet, Africa, with 60% of the world's best solar potential, received just 2% of clean energy investment last year.

That is injustice on a staggering scale. The people in the Global South who are most affected by the climate crisis, do not have fair access to the solutions.

This is not just a climate issue. It's a matter of *equity, dignity, and development*. Without bold policy action, massive infrastructure investments, and financial reform, the clean energy transition risks leaving entire regions behind.

Pathways to a just energy future

The Secretary-General laid out a powerful six-point agenda to make this transition *just, inclusive, and accelerated*;

New NDCs must align with justice

The narrative on our shared energy future is does not always align with stated goals and ambitions. Renewable targets are more relevant and likely to be met when fossil fuel expansion is no longer on the table. He called for NDCs to:

- Cover all sectors and emissions,
- Align with 1.5°C,
- Triple renewable energy capacity by 2030,
- End fossil fuel subsidies and international public finance for coal, oil, and gas.

Build energy systems for the future

Renewable energy cannot just be installed, it must be accessible. For every 1 USD spent on renewables, only 60 cents go to grids and storage. The SG cited data that suggested there is 3x more renewable energy ready to be plugged into the grid, than was able to be added to the grid. Without modern, agile and flexible grid infrastructure (whether that be mini-, off-, regional or national grid options), it will be impossible to power the last mile and to reach 100% access as called for in SDG7. He makes the case for:

- Modern, flexible, digital grids,
- Massive scale-up of storage,
- EV charging infrastructure,
- Electrification across buildings, transport, and industry.

Energy demands are rising and should be met sustainably

From AI to cooling, electricity demand is exploding. Just one large AI data-centre uses as much energy as 2 million average homes. The SG called on the tech sector to commit to powering *all data centers with 100% renewables by 2030*. **Governments must ensure all new electricity demand is met with clean energy.**

A just energy transition is not an option

The energy transition is not future-just or sustainable long term, unless it leaves nobody behind. The SG made a strong case for:

- Supporting and retraining fossil fuel workers,
- Empowering women, Indigenous Peoples, and youth,
- Ending exploitative mining practices,
- Implementing rights-based standards for critical minerals.

Trade and tech transfer are necessary

While upscaling renewable energy is certainly a way to speed up sustainable development efforts, it is not necessarily a question of aid. It is an opportunity for trade, investment and building up green industry for future economic health. As the SG said, trade is a tool for transformation:

- Cut tariffs on clean energy goods,
- Modernise investment treaties,
- Build diverse, secure supply chains,
- Tackle Investor-State Dispute Settlement clauses that can stall progress.

Enable clean energy financing for the Global South

Access to clean energy finance remains shamefully unequal. The statistics SG Guterres cited are staggering: Although it has 60% of the world's most promising solar resources, it received only 2% of global clean energy investment last year. Across the last 10 years, only 1 out of every 5 clean energy dollars was available to emerging and developing countries – outside of China. To enable affordable, universal clean energy access, investments in clean energy must increase more than 5x by 2030.

Therefore, achieving net zero targets means:

- Multiply clean energy investment fivefold in developing countries by 2030,

- Reform the global financial system,
- Expand debt-for-climate swaps,
- Shift outdated risk models that keep capital too expensive for emerging economies.

Creating a just future for future generations

The fossil fuel age is not the future. We are standing at the threshold of a **clean energy era**. We are looking to build a future where communities create and control their own energy, where energy security and economic opportunity are part of an environmentally positive cycle, and where electricity is accessible to all. The systemic changes needed to achieve this future are possible, but this future will not create itself. As SG Guterres said, *“We have the tools to power the future for humanity. Let’s make the most of them.”*

Now is the time to demand bold policies. To push for justice. To fight for inclusion. Because a just transition is not just possible, it is *essential*.

Please take time to read the Secretary General’s full speech:
<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2025-07-22/secretary-generals-remarks-climate-action-moment-of-opportunity-supercharging-the-clean-energy-age-delivered-scroll-down-for-all-french>

#justtransition **#renewableenergy** **#climatejustice** **#cleanenergy** **#SDG7**
#futuregenerations