



Ruggero Schleicher-Tappeser,  
consultant to the German government  
in the foundation process of IRENA

# 'Founding of IRENA is milestone for sustainable development'

Without a rapid shift to renewable energies there is no sustainable development. The widely supported foundation of IRENA is an important step in this direction. This was stated by Ruggero Schleicher-Tappeser, consultant to the German government in the foundation process of IRENA, in an interview with *Energetica India* during his visit to India.

### **What IRENA is all about?**

IRENA (International Renewable Energy Agency) is a new international intergovernmental organisation, which was founded on January 26 this year in Bonn, Germany. The statute has been signed by 78 countries till date, amongst them 28 African, 27 European, 16 Asian and 7 Latin-American countries. In all, 75 countries had inked the Statute during the founding conference; the remaining countries signed later. India too signed recently. Governments of many more countries are supposed to join soon. The founding of IRENA is a milestone for promoting renewables and a clear sign that the global energy paradigm is changing.

### **What is the objective of IRENA?**

The main objective of IRENA is to promote renewable energies worldwide through cooperation between different countries.

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The Statute of IRENA mainly addresses national governance and policy issues in different countries pertaining to renewable energy. Radically, the Agency intends to facilitate access to all relevant information, including reliable data on the potentials for renewable energy, best practices, effective financial mechanisms, and state-of-the-art technological expertise. IRENA will offer advice to its members on creating appropriate framework conditions, undertake capacity building as well as foster learning from best practice. IRENA will closely cooperate with other international organisa-

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tions and institutions active in the field of renewable energy.

### **What is the roadmap for IRENA?**

IRENA was founded in an exceptionally rapid manner. The first international gathering for concretely discussing ideas about the mission and the structure of IRENA was held in April 2008. At the foundation conference, less than nine months later, more governments were ready to sign the Statutes than we had dared to hope. Many others expressed their strong interest but could not conclude their internal decision making procedures due to the short time available.

We are now in a preparatory stage. During the founding conference a Preparatory Commission was constituted, which consists of the signatory countries and acts as an interim Assembly. Its task is to build up the organisation as rapidly as possible. The preparatory phase will end with the coming into force of the Statutes, which will occur upon the 25th ratification. The next session of the Preparatory Commission will be held in June in Sharm El Sheik (Egypt), it will have to decide upon the location of the headquarters of IRENA and the (interim) Director General. The next step will then be to really build up the secretariat, the operative structure of the Agency.

An Administrative Committee was also formed to assist the Preparatory Commission in preparing its next steps, like the next session and the development of an initial work programme.

IRENA will mainly work from its Headquarters, at least in the first years of its existence, and will strongly cooperate with other international organisations. Cooperation with UN organisations and programmes such as UNDP and UNEP will be essential, which run thousands of concrete development projects on the ground and have staff all over the world.

**What would be the working strategy of IRENA? How it would facilitate technology transfer?**

The rapid and widespread introduction of renewable energy requires a huge global learning process. IRENA's role will be to facilitate this process in various ways. IRENA will emphasise the development of a coherent approach in promoting renewable energy. Experience exchange between countries will be a very important element. IRENA experts will not just give their own advice but promote the exchange of knowledge gathered in different countries. Technology transfer will be a very important issue. Appropriate mechanisms still have to be developed – improving international cooperation concerning training programmes at all levels will play an essential role. Also how to link technology transfer to international financing instruments will be an important issue.

**How is IRENA going to generate funds?**

IRENA will be financed through contributions of its members. The Agency itself will not manage funds for projects of others. However, it shall help its members to get better access to international financing mechanisms. There is an expectation that carbon trading will create important finance flows to be used for climate change mitigation. How to organise these flows is still a difficult matter of discussion. In cooperation with other organisations – such as the World Bank, UNEP etc. – IRENA should help to find mechanisms for bridging the gap between the very large sums in international funds and the small sums required by a huge number of renewable energy projects on the ground.

**Will IRENA itself appropate funds for projects?**

IRENA would not provide funds directly to

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its members. But it will help its members to have better and structured access to the funds.

**What would be the structure of the body?**

The main structure of IRENA will be the Secretariat at the seat of the Agency, experts will also work temporarily in projects

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in member countries. The Secretariat will initially have 120 to 150 staff, and will probably grow over time. The membership of the organisation is much larger than we had expected. I suppose, it will further grow in the very first year of the Agency.

**What would be the first activity IRENA would undertake, with constitution of the body?**

This is what we are now discussing. In 2009 the number of projects that can be started is very limited. However, first consultancy projects for member governments would probably come into operation. The

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special emphasis has still to be decided: it might be on overall national approaches, on training issues, on financing mechanisms or on other key issues of IRENA. We have discussed a draft initial programme of the organisation last summer. We even had designed specific projects in main activity fields. Now we have to set priorities.

**What is the role of the German government in establishing IRENA?**

The German government was the main promoter of the whole process. Pushing forward the foundation of IRENA was part of the programme of the present government. Since the second meeting last summer it was strongly supported by Spain and Denmark – two countries also strongly engaged in own policies to promote renewables. The breakthrough came with the final preparatory conference in Madrid last autumn, where a large international support became evident. After the foundation conference, the responsibility now rests on more shoulders, but Germany is still strongly engaged having been appointed as Chair of the Administrative Committee.

**What sea of change could IRENA bring in future?**

We need to transform energy systems fast and quickly in view of climate change and in view of depleting fossil fuels. The transformation is also necessary to light up the life of 2 billion people, who are still living without electricity supply. We have only some years left for radically changing the direction of development towards a sustainable energy supply if we want to avoid very serious problems within our lifetime. In the medium/long run renewable energies will be able and will have to cover all energy needs. Sensing the huge potential of renewable energy, an initially small number of governments has funded programmes creating larger markets for renewable energies. This has led to mass production, considerable innovation and rapidly decreasing costs. We need to learn more quickly from each other. That is where IRENA comes in, where IRENA can help. It intends to play an important facilitating role in this huge transformation process. Without renewable energy there will be no sustainable development.

**OMNI-EDITIONS INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED**  
17 Shradhanand Marg, Chawani  
Indore – 452 001 INDIA  
Tel. + 91 731 255 3881 | Fax. + 91 731 400 7524  
[www.energetica-india.com](http://www.energetica-india.com)



**EDITOR:**

EUGENIO PÉREZ DE LEMA  
[eugenio@energetica-india.com](mailto:eugenio@energetica-india.com)

**CEO:**

ANAND GUPTA  
[a.gupta@energetica-india.com](mailto:a.gupta@energetica-india.com)

**DIRECTOR:**

GISELA BÜHL  
[gisela.buehl@energetica-india.com](mailto:gisela.buehl@energetica-india.com)

**Editorial Department:**

NITI PARIKH  
[parikhniti10@energetica-india.com](mailto:parikhniti10@energetica-india.com)

ZOHA MAHDI  
[zmahdi@energetica-india.com](mailto:zmahdi@energetica-india.com)

**Commercial Department:**

GOURAV GARG  
[gourav@energetica-india.com](mailto:gourav@energetica-india.com)

GAJENDRA MALL  
[gajendra@energetica-india.com](mailto:gajendra@energetica-india.com)

**Contacts in Spain**

C/ Rosa de Lima, 1 bis. Edif. Alba – Ofic. 104  
28290 Las Matas (Madrid) – SPAIN  
Tel +34 902 364 699  
Fax +34 916 308 595

**Spain + Abroad:**

RAQUEL RAMOS  
[raquel@energetica-india.com](mailto:raquel@energetica-india.com)

ANDREW CALLAWAY  
[andrew@energetica-india.com](mailto:andrew@energetica-india.com)

**Spain:**

ÁLVARO LÓPEZ  
[alvaro@energetica-india.com](mailto:alvaro@energetica-india.com)

**Layout and Design:**

DANIEL CONEJERO BERNARDO  
Contras-t

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# EDITORIAL

As this edition of *Energetica India* went to press the world's largest democracy was undergoing Parliamentary Elections. Union government released to the public the draft of the National Solar Mission. It aims to make India a global leader in solar energy and envisages an installed solar generation capacity of 20,000 MW by 2020, of 100,000 MW by 2030 and of 200,000 MW by 2050.

To be undertaken in three phases, the first mission, of National Action Plan on Climate Change, will focus on research and development, bringing down the cost, encouraging installation of solar panels on rooftops of buildings and generation of electricity through solar power plants. Movement from major international players within the renewable industry in India is evident with Astonfields investment plans (see page 15) a precursor in what will surely be a leading market of the future.

With India making headways towards sustainable development, industrialized nations are converging here. In March, Solar Trade Mission envoys of around 17 US companies visited India looking for opportunities in the country. The Solar Trade Mission concluded on an encouraging note and a belief that the Indian solar industry is well positioned for the next solar revolution. Following the trend, the Swedish delegation's recent visit, to India, opened the doors of opportunities for the nuclear industry. Long term collaborations with Swedish companies could be in the offering.

When the highly ambitious visits of foreign delegations to India were going on, the issues pertaining to negotiations in the upcoming meet at Copenhagen were making the rounds. Discussions and deliberations, over the final proposal from India, are in progress to combat climate change and address energy security. Economic reforms are directly propositional to energy security. If India has to achieve 8-10 percent growth, which is necessary for the eradication of poverty, it will have to address the rising energy concerns. Today, imports meet 70 per cent of India's oil requirements and the figure could reach to 90 per cent by 2030. Relying upon foreign oil neither ensures security nor sustainable development. As India is still undergoing the development phase, there is an opportunity to move towards and lead the way in a low carbon economy. The next government of India has a major challenge to face. Which ever political party is in power in India in the next month they need to implement and carry through a plan that is sustainable, workable and above all meets the needs of the growing population.

Your views and comments are important to us. Feel free to make contact via our web site [www.energetica-india.com](http://www.energetica-india.com)  
Enjoy the latest edition of *Energetica India*.

Best regards,

The *Energetica India* team.