Distinguished panelists, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to the UN Day dialogues on “Energy for Sustainable Development”.

The centrality of energy to economic growth, social progress, and environmental sustainability is now well recognized and for the first time we have a dedicated development goal on energy (SDG 7) to “ensure access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable modern energy for all”.

Progress towards many of the other goals including poverty eradication, better health and education, women empowerment, clean water, and food security also depends on the achievement of the energy goal.

Addressing climate challenges and stabilizing the global increase in average temperature to “well below 2 degrees” with the ideal goal of 1.5 degrees, as called for in the Paris Agreement, will also remain unmet without sustainable energy.

Despite these important interlinkages, we are still facing a number of important energy challenges. On one hand, 1.09 billion people in the world still live without electricity and over 3 billion still cook and heat their homes by using polluting fuels like kerosene, wood, charcoal and dung. On the other hand, two thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions come from the energy sector alone, which make energy a key sector for addressing climate challenges.

These energy challenges have huge bearings on economic development, environmental sustainability, and people’s well-being and prosperity. Energy sector transformation is therefore critical for countries to achieve their climate and development goals and objectives.

The good news is that there are a number of promising trends which demonstrate that this transformation is possible, including:

- dramatic reductions in sustainable energy hardware costs; for example, solar panel and wind turbine costs have fallen significantly in the past decade, making renewable energy cost-competitive with fossil-fuel technologies in many parts of the world;
- countries’ energy systems are already in transition. Large, centralized power plants are being complemented by small-scale, decentralized energy generation to power homes, businesses, and communities for which there are many sustainable solutions available; and
- innovative business models for renewable energy supply are emerging. Pay-as-you-go solar home kits in East Africa, for example, are disrupting long established markets for kerosene, and offering consumers sustainable energy alternatives.

The magnitude of the challenge however means that we need to do much more, faster and better to advance SDG 7 on energy.

The United Nations recognizes that such a monumental shift requires scaling up action on all three targets: universal access, energy efficiency and renewable energy. According to recent estimates by the World Bank and the International Energy Agency, projections show that at the current rate of progress, only 91 percent of the world will have electricity access in 2030, while only 72 percent will have access to clean cooking. Improvements in energy intensity are also projected to fall short of the 2030 goal while the share of renewables will only reach 21 percent by that time. These estimates underscore the need for urgent action.

Accelerating the pace of progress requires coherence across countries’ climate, energy, and development goals and integrated approaches. The majority of countries’ Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), highlight the energy sector as a vital component to achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement. However, energy sector plans, SDG and NDC implementation plans should be aligned. This helps ensure NDCs include all opportunities to reduce energy-related emissions while energy sector planning can contribute to advancing the goal and targets under both the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
Innovative and inclusive business models that facilitate access to finance will also be critical, including to the end-users and the most vulnerable. The private sector will have a huge role to play in that regard but their engagement can be a challenge, especially for developing countries that may be deemed ‘risky’ by investors. These challenges are not insurmountable. Efforts can and should be taken to address perceived risks and to leverage both public and private resources. This represents a unique opportunity for collaboration and partnerships between the public and private sector to meet the financial resources necessary to accomplish the SDG 7 and the Paris Agreement.

Developing countries’ capacities to overcome barriers to investment and finance as well as enhancing their access to information and technological innovation is a key priority in achieving national energy, climate and development goals.

The United Nations and its agencies are working closely with Member States to address these various issues. Today’s dialogues provide an opportunity to showcase some of this work carried out by the participating UN agencies. As the UN Commissioner for Expo, I thank all the agencies who are here with us today. I also thank the Government of Kazakhstan and the Expo organizations for inviting the UN and making this opportunity possible. I hope that today’s dialogues will deepen discussions on opportunities and challenges in accelerating the achievement of SDG 7 goal and targets.

Let me end by re-iterating that future economic growth and sustainable development is predicated on an energy transition – one that ensures universal access to energy for all but also recognizes that failure to mitigate emissions is not an option. The SDGs and the Paris Agreement provide the necessary frameworks for such a transformation. Efforts now must focus on implementation and scaling up action. The United Nations is committed to working with all partners to that end.

Thank you.