



Date: Tuesday 14 October
Time: 15:00- 17:30
Location: Tempus Building

As global challenges, including the climate crisis, have become more connected, the responses cannot remain fragmented. Panelists will focus on integrated, cross-sectoral solutions that recognize the systemic nature of the crisis and avoid siloed approaches, also examining whether democracies are better equipped to identify and provide such solutions.

QUNO presentation

I speak from our involvement for over a decade in climate science, in international climate negotiations, and in the Human Rights Council.

I have been asked to address cross-sectoral solutions related to ENERGY.

Yet we have also been asked to examine whether democracies are better equipped to identify and provide such solutions.

This is an unusual question, coming at a profound time for many democracies. For that reason, I will first start with democracy, move to the connection with rights-based approaches, and then focus on cross-sectoral solutions for sustainable and equitable energy access.

To speak personally:

I was born in a democracy that prioritizes a market-based economy.

I now live in a democracy that describes itself as a ‘social democracy’.

Over the decades I have also lived in a communist system, under military occupation, and in war zones experiencing societal meltdown.

I mention my personal experience with democracy because not all democratic systems are the same – some prioritize the question ‘will this help the economy’, some ask ‘will this benefit society?’

And the chosen priority has a profound consequence to the stability of society, the health of the country.

In addition, many democracies lack proportional representation. Quite a few cling to a ‘winner takes all’. Yet this can lead to despair - what is the point of voting?’

Disempowerment, lack of inclusion and resulting despair endanger societal stability, and endanger the success of sustainable energy transitions.

In turn, applying human-rights based approaches to sustainable transitions is the very definition of meaningful inclusion.

This is because people who have been meaningfully included in decision making, who experience benefit – they are more likely to feel positive about the system transformations we need to make for our long-term survival.

I do not use the term ‘long-term survival’ lightly. To quote an IPCC science author – ‘the difference between a 1.5C and a 3+ C global temperature rise – which is where we are headed - is the difference between the manageable, and the **unmanageable** and the **unimaginable**.’

Current emissions have us on track **for +3C rise above** pre-industrial levels by 2100. The rate of rise is too fast for most species to adjust.

These are scary times. And people without a vision are lost. Democracy or no democracy.

But in the overwhelm of DOOM, we also fail to tell the story of what healthy transformations could OFFER through rights-based approaches.

- Clean, affordable, accessible and renewable energy – often self-generated.
- Cleaner air and water
- More equitable and fair societies
- Healthier children
- Preserved rainforests, surviving coral reefs, reversal of species extinction
- Sustainable consumption and production
- Green jobs
- Reduced military expenditure, thus reduced war and reduced emissions
- Livable, tolerant cities

Over a decade ago, in these buildings, UN Independent Expert John Knox concluded that *‘Integrating a rights-based approach to local, national and international policies promotes policy coherence, legitimacy and sustainable outcomes.’*

When transformations are not experienced as fair – backlash. Protests. No in my backyard. Democracies are particularly susceptible to backlash.

What do we know about integrated, cross-sectoral solutions that recognize the systemic nature of the crisis and avoid siloed approaches?

We know from the IPCC, that fossil fuels account for approximately two-thirds of annual global anthropogenic GHG emissions.

We know from the IPCC that reaching net zero is only possible through rapid reduction of fossil fuels.

We see most wealthy fossil fuel countries increasing rather than capping or decreasing fossil fuel production, in turn preaching carbon capture and storage as a solution despite the IPCC stating it is less effective, more expensive, not proven to scale, and should only be used for hard to abate emissions.

We know that Carbon Dioxide Removal is being proposed at profoundly unsustainable levels, and our forests are already burning and dying.

What then can we do, for *integrated, cross-sectoral solutions* in sustainable energy?

Start by **asking the following questions**:

- Who owns the energy?
- Who benefits directly?
- Are ongoing polluters held accountable?
- Who pays for polluters' clean-up?
- Do our policies help the poorest with energy independence?
- Do we encourage community ownership and energy reliance?

To do these fairly, you need fair and transparent laws and regulations.

For example:

Ownership:

- Make wind turbines legally required to be owned by electricity consumers. Denmark spearheaded this years ago with wind projects – at one time, 85% of wind power was owned by the residents of Danish communities. Buy-in.
- Sufficient Feed-in Tariffs so that communities, cooperatives, and landowner collectives can pool their resources and put up their own turbines and solar panels. When resources are pooled, even the poorest in the communities can also benefit from renewable energy in their homes and lessen the inequality in resource allocation.
- Energiewende in Germany that triggered a strong increase in renewable energy supply in the country. It endorses a general vision of an alternative society based on decentralized structures, bottom-up processes, participatory democracy, and environmentally conscious economies with decentralized, renewable power supply with many smaller, localized producers.
- For solar PV, people could get a loan from government owned development bank (KfW) and energy companies were required to purchase the electricity generated at guaranteed subsidized electricity rates, which in turn paid back the loan directly until the solar panels were fully owned. This inclusivity meant that wealth did not factor into who was able to benefit from the renewable energy boom.

- Developing countries are often in the lead with renewable energy – not only cheaper and cleaner, but also more accessible and reliable alongside energy grid updates – we see booms across a range of countries - Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, India and Maldives, to name only a few.

To implement energy transformations, you need funding.

Questions to ask:

- Are we shifting subsidies away from fossil fuels and toward sustainable energy?
- Are we working for debt relief in developing countries?
- Are we calling for grants over loans to developing countries, and to the poorer communities in our countries?
- Are we shifting military expenditure to climate and earthcare, what really makes us safe?

In addition - Consider IPCC Mitigation findings that are too few talk about:

- Prioritize electrified and expanded public transport
 - o Not luxury electric cars for the upper middle class – this misses the point.
- Promote public health and public education – that is also mitigation
- Legally hold to rights-based approaches in critical minerals mining – avoid repeating power abuses.

And the obvious that we often fail to talk about:

1. Energy efficiency
2. Energy reduction use
 - a. sustainable consumption and production
 - b. Address the role of extreme wealth:
 - i. Currently, the top% of incomes holders worldwide are responsible for up to 45% of GHG emissions
3. Support farmers to shift from industrial to sustainable agriculture
4. Talk about diets – meat is both an ENERGY and a biodiversity collapse issue.
5. Talk about Sufficiency economics – we live on a planet with limited natural resources.
6. Talk about military spending and its relation to GHG emissions through bombing and fossil fuel use.
 - a. Consider how many wars, how many people have died, over fossil fuel resource control.

I leave us with words from Alaa Abd el Fattah, recently released after 12 years' incarceration as a political prisoner.

He encourages us to focus on how we as humanity can all live together.

'There is', he said, 'a deadlock of imagination in the Global North, and there is a deadlock of possibility in the Global South'.

What does this have to do with sustainable ENERGY transformations?

EVERYTHING

Thank you.

Lindsey Fielder Cook, 14 October 2025