



28 August 2002

U.S. Official Says Innovative Programs are Needed to Meet World's Energy Demands

U.S. opposes setting targets for renewable energy

By Jim Fuller

Washington File Correspondent

Johannesburg - A senior U.S. official at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) said August 28 that the United States strongly supports the use of renewable energy sources to bring energy services to people who now have no access, but opposes setting global targets for renewable energy.

Boosting solar, wind and other clean forms of energy is widely seen by international delegates to be one of the main ways of fulfilling the summit's twin objectives: tackling world poverty and reversing degradation of the environment.

A report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) says that 1,600 million people today have no access to electricity, 2,400 million people still rely on primitive biomass for cooking and heating, and 2 million people die prematurely each year from exposure to indoor smoke emitted by biomass fuels.

A official from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), speaking on background, told a group of reporters that the challenge is to break the cycle of poverty by increasing access to affordable, reliable, clean, efficient energy sources. He said the best way to do this is through partnerships that enable countries to develop national energy strategies and financing packages for new, clean energy possibilities.

He said one such partnership, to be announced during the summit, will be Powering Sustainable Development - a program in which the United States will coordinate its resources and expertise with other governments, the private sector, civil society and development organizations to provide millions of people with new access to energy services. Under the initiative, several U.S. federal agencies would invest up to \$43 million in 2003 to leverage an estimated \$400 million in investments from other partners.

"The initiative is comprehensive in the sense that it tries to look at all aspects of the problem by providing access to energy services, addressing the indoor energy issue, and promoting energy efficiency in the production and delivery of energy," the DOE official said.

He said that, for the most part, the provision of these energy services will be through renewable sources. This is because many developing countries do not have an established power-grid electricity delivery infrastructure, and the use of solar, wind, biomass or "whatever indigenous resources there are may be a more economical and more environmentally-friendly alternative," he said.

The official emphasized, however, that the United States opposes the establishment of a global target, such as a proposal by the European Union to have renewable energy sources meet 15 percent of the world's needs by 2010.

"We have maintained consistently that targets in and of themselves do not deliver the sorts of energy services that are needed," he said. One reason for this, he said, is because it is a country's policy and regulatory regimes that will encourage the increased adoption of renewable energy technologies, not targets.

"We need to let the local countries determine what the targets should be, because they're in the best position to do so," he said. "Too much attention in the negotiations is being focused on targets and not enough attention on other ways of getting these technologies into use."

He said that in the United States about 10 states have adopted so-called renewable energy portfolio standards, or targets, and the U.S. Senate is debating a bill that calls for establishment of a national renewable energy standard that would require the use of a certain percentage of renewable energy by a certain date. The Bush administration opposes such a national standard, and would allow each state to decide if it wanted to establish one.

The DOE official said a national standard might work very well for a state that has a lot of wind, for example, "but it will create a situation where you have wealth transfers from states that don't have renewable energy resources to states that do have them."

At the same time, he said, the U.S. government is totally committed to renewable energy, having spent over \$13,000 million on renewable energy development in the last 20 years. He added that the president's national energy plan calls for \$53,000 million in subsidies for energy efficiency and renewable energy, and zero subsidies for oil and natural gas development.

In a separate press briefing, IEA Executive Director Robert Priddle warned that the world "is not on a sustainable energy path unless we make considerable changes." He identified several areas where action must be taken in order to guarantee a sustainable energy future, including greater efficiency in the use of energy, greater use of renewable energies and developing sustainable transportation systems.

Priddle said that rapidly increasing populations and vehicle use have created gridlock and sprawl, as well as exceptionally high levels of air pollution. He added, however, that there are solutions, and that a new IEA publication, entitled "Bus Systems for the Future, Achieving Sustainable Transport Worldwide," shows how new bus transit systems can revolutionize urban travel.

In another development, summit negotiators completed agreement on a series of provisions aimed at promoting sustainable fishing, including a commitment by countries to restore depleted fisheries to their maximum sustainable yield by 2015. Presently, three-quarters of the world's fisheries are fished to their sustainable levels or beyond.

The agreement also calls on countries to ratify the United Nations Law of the Sea Treaty as well as the International Maritime Organization convention.

This site is produced and maintained by the U.S. Department of State's Office of International Information Programs (usinfo.state.gov). Links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.

[back to top](#) ▲

[IIP Home](#) | [Index to This Site](#) | [Webmaster](#) | [Search This Site](#) | [Archives](#) | [U.S. Department of State](#)