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THE UAE'S RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

As stated by President of the United Arab Emirates His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, 'the prospects of the country are contingent on our ability to manage our national resources with wisdom and keenness for the future'. Half a decade has passed since the signing of the Paris Agreement, an unprecedented pledge made by countries to spur transformative actions to counter the existential threat of climate change. Although there has been a significant uptick in international cooperation on climate in this period, the frequency of extreme weather events has risen by 400 percent since then. Over the years, the pace of climate change has had destructive effects on the planet.

UN Secretary General António Guterres has recently called on leaders worldwide to declare a state of climate emergency in their countries as climate changes affect all economic sectors and segments of society. The growing scientific evidence of climate change affirms the urgent need for ramping up climate action.

The United Arab Emirates is located in a water-scarce hyper-arid environment; therefore, adaptation to new conditions is of extreme importance and needs considerable effort. Although climate change is a threat to the UAE, we regard it as an opportunity for diversifying the economy and tapping into new growth engines in the form of innovative green products and services. Our country is already on the right track: The large-scale introduction of solar energy technologies is an example of the UAE's leadership in taking climate action and addressing the global sustainable development agenda.

Through the National Climate Change Plan, the Emirates will further strive to be at the frontline of global efforts and prove that climate action can go hand in hand with continuous economic development. Built on national policies relevant to 'green' growth and sustainable development, particularly the UAE Green Agenda 2015–2030, and reflecting on valuable inputs received from stakeholders from public, private, and non-governmental sectors, the Climate Plan ensures the country's rapid advance in this direction. It is not a standalone policy but rather a complementary plan of action specifically tackling climate change.

The United Arab Emirates is a leader and key partner in the international effort in climate action. Being the first Middle Eastern nation to sign the Paris Agreement, the UAE was also the first country in the region to submit its Nationally

Determined Contribution (NDC). It is one of eight countries worldwide to submit its second NDC.

The Emirates is not included into the Annex 1 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); therefore, we are not obligated to reduce our carbon emissions. Yet, the UAE has voluntarily chosen to implement such actions; moreover, the UAE is committed to expanding the role of low-carbon technologies in the economy and investing in renewable energy and nuclear power.

It bears emphasising that the UAE is the first Gulf country to start developing a new energy strategy, which involves the nuclear power and solar energy in addition to natural gas, which covers the majority of the UAE's needs.

The countries' largest emirate, Abu Dhabi, has committed more than \$15 billion to renewable energy programmes through the Masdar City Initiative, which underscores twin commitments to the global environment and diversification of the UAE's economy. The initiative's partners include some of the world's largest energy companies and elite institutions, namely BP, Shell, Occidental Petroleum, Total Exploration and Production, General Electric, Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Rolls Royce, Imperial College London, MIT, and WWF.

Further indicator of the UAE's significance in global cooperation on climate is the fact that the UAE is home to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), an intergovernmental organisation promoting sustainability. It is the first international organisation with global membership headquartered in the Middle East. We really welcome and appreciate Ukrainian efforts within this organisation.

In addition to its multilateral commitments, the UAE actively supports developing countries in their climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives, especially by means of renewable energy, humanitarian relief, and prevention. In total, the UAE has invested in renewable energy ventures a value of around \$16.8 billion across 70 countries, including aid and concessional loans to implement renewable energy projects in 27 island nations.

Masdar Projects in 30 countries are helping to enhance access to renewable energy and clean technology solutions, totalling 11 gigawatts (GW) both in developed and resource constrained nations. In January 2020, the company made its first investment in Australia after acquiring a stake in the country's second utility-scale waste-to-energy (WTE) facility, East Rockingham Waste to Energy. In November 2019, Masdar signed a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and a Government Support Agreement (GSA) with the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan to design, finance, build, and operate the country's first public-private partnership (PPP) solar power plant. Masdar has installed solar home systems in more than two dozen villages around Camp Robinson in Helmand Province, southern Afghanistan. The project is enhancing the lives of more than 3,000 people who had no access to electricity.

After the successful launch of the 15-megawatt (MW) Sheikh Zayed Solar Power Plant in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania, in 2013, Masdar has installed an additional 16.6 MW photovoltaic projects across eight remote communities in the country. The Port Victoria Wind Power Project, Masdar's six-megawatt wind farm in the Republic of Seychelles, is the country's first large-scale renewable energy project. It accounts for more than eight percent of the grid capacity on the archipelago's main island of Mahe, where 90 percent of the country's residents live.

In this regard, I would like to note that a memorandum of understanding has been signed between Masdar and leading Ukrainian companies that gives us an opportunity to help Ukraine to achieve its clean energy goals. The document was signed during the official state visit of President of Ukraine Mr Volodymyr Zelenskyy and First Lady of Ukraine Mrs Olena Zelenska to the UAE. The Masdar's business model is based on forging strong partnerships in the sectors and regions in which the company operates, and we look forward to exploring potential areas of collaboration with Ukraine.

Nonetheless, even despite the collective efforts exerted to combat climate change, the path to a climate-safe future is still long. We urge countries to strengthen their commitments in this sphere because many things are still to be done. Climate change poses a significant challenge to our economies and societies, and combating it requires long-term sustainable strategies. As His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has noted, 'climate change is the most prominent battle for humankind in the coming decades to preserve planet Earth for new generations'.