



**Statement of Mr. LI Yong
Director General
United Nations Industrial Development Organization**

at the

**Opening of the
nineteenth session of the
UNIDO General Conference**

**29 November 2021
Vienna, Austria**

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great privilege and honour to warmly welcome you to the nineteenth session of the UNIDO General Conference. I welcome all of you, from wherever you may be joining in every corner of the world.

At the outset, let me express my appreciation to the outgoing President of the General Conference, His Excellency Mr. Suhail Al Mazrouei, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure of the United Arab Emirates, particularly for the hospitality afforded to us all at the successful General Conference in Abu Dhabi, and to welcome the incoming President, His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Mezghani of Tunisia. I also express my appreciation to the Government of Austria for their consistent support to me.

Excellencies,

As this is the last time I have the privilege to open a General Conference of UNIDO, a moment that fulfills me with special feelings, allow me to share my reflections on the past eight years and on the future of this Organization.

I would like to start by going back to the moment of my acceptance speech in June 2013, after having just been appointed the seventh Director General of UNIDO.

I felt deeply thankful for the trust of Member States, humbled by the high expectations placed in me, excited about the new tasks ahead, and grateful for the opportunity to make a change.

In my acceptance speech I outlined a five pillars strategy that guided me during my tenure at the helm of the Organization.

The first pillar was called “direction and mandate”. In 2013, as the international community was preparing for the post-2015 development agenda, my first priority was to refine and clarify the direction for the Organization. This was important at a time as the international community

moved from the Millennium Development Goals towards a set of internationally agreed goals that reflected the three elements of sustainable development.

The conception of inclusive and sustainable industrial development, ISID, as a comprehensive but distinct mandate and vision was a critical step for the Organization.

Following the adoption of ISID at the General Conference in Lima, Peru, in 2013, and with the support of you, our Member States, we firmly anchored UNIDO's mandate in the 2030 Agenda as SDG 9.

The redefined and revitalized mandate not only raised the importance of industrial development and increased the recognition of our work, but also helped to reconnect our mandate and expertise to the emerging global development agenda.

This brings me to the second pillar, which is about addressing the diverse needs, priorities and challenges of our Member States.

UNIDO needed a concrete response to the high expectations of our Member States. Given the different industrialization stages and demands of our partner countries, UNIDO's development cooperation interventions needed to be founded on a broader palette of services. These came to include industrial strategy, policy advice, convening and normative functions, in addition to traditional technical cooperation activities.

The tailored strategies for different country groups further solidified this approach, whether it concerned the strategy for middle-income countries, small island developing States, countries in post-conflict and post-crisis situations, or for the many different geographical regions that we operate in.

While continuing our traditional support to least developed countries, we paid increased attention to middle-income countries and economies in transition, supporting them in the area of the fourth industrial revolution or with diversifying and greening their economies.

Another highlight of this approach was the proclamation by the General Assembly of the Third Industrial Development Decade for Africa,

IDDA III, which raised ambitions to step up progress of structural transformation in Africa.

The third pillar of my strategy, to strengthen and expand partnerships, proved to be important given the increasing demand for our services.

In this context, the Programme for Country Partnerships, PCP, was an important innovation to drive greater development impact, bringing different stakeholders together and to better integrate UNIDO's research and advisory functions.

As experience shows, national ownership and high-level leadership are important for the success of this model, and I am very pleased about the strategic support expressed by many leaders, including the Presidents and Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Morocco, Nigeria, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia.

Our approach to partnerships has also meant a closer cooperation with our UN sister-agencies, UN resident coordinators and country teams, as well as with international financial institutions, the private sector and other stakeholders in academia and civil society.

Our partnership approach has greatly enhanced the relationship that we have with you, our Member States, the donor community and funding partners.

The expansion of such partnerships is exemplified by UNIDO's recent Green Climate Fund accreditation. This partnership will be critical for the future of the Organization, as we aim to take climate action to a much larger scale than before.

Both to make the internal systems ready for such future opportunities and to maintain the confidence of our stakeholders, it was important to continuously work on the implementation of the fourth pillar, improving internal operations and management.

I am proud that UNIDO has been working tirelessly to improve its operational efficiency and effectiveness, to enhance quality and quantity of delivery, and to act as a rules-based organization with results-based

orientation. We have improved transparency and enhanced our strategic focus through, for example, updates to our medium-term programme framework and the integrated results and performance framework. The first result-based programme and budgets developed for the Organization is a reflection of our commitment to continuously improve and deliver results for our Member States. The frameworks on accountability, internal controls and risks, full cost recovery, and the Resource Optimization in Technical Cooperation initiative are among the many other improvements that have been launched.

As an international gender champion, I personally committed to engage my personnel to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women. I am very pleased that I leave UNIDO with a robust organizational policy and strategy on gender equality and the empowerment of women that is aligned with UN system-wide best practice, and that UNIDO has made progress to meet its policy and strategy commitments in this area.

UNIDO's performance on gender equality has been consistently increasing: in 2020, UNIDO met or exceeded 88 per cent of UN-SWAP indicators, which is significantly above the UN system average of 68 per cent.

Moving from fine-tuning internal management to the fifth and final pillar of my vision, it was and remains clear that UNIDO is only as good as its workforce, our staff. The fifth pillar of my strategy therefore concerned our personnel as our most precious asset.

Throughout my tenure I worked hard to ensure that our employees achieve their full potential at UNIDO, and that they feel secure, supported, inspired and valued in our Organization.

Based on my personal close cooperation and looking at what we have achieved together, I am very proud of the UNIDO workforce, our colleagues. I commend them for their commitment, and pay tribute to the important individual contributions, their passion, sacrifices and dedication to the ISID mission.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Reflecting on the past years and looking at the present UNIDO, I am pleased that I am handing over an agile and innovative Organization that is on solid footing.

Guided by our Member States, under the leadership of my successor, Mr. Müller, UNIDO has great potential to provide solutions to the major challenges of the future.

Poverty, unemployment, and hunger remain the most persistent and daunting challenges for our world. The triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, coupled with resource-depletion, is yet another life-and-death issue of the future that needs to be addressed now. Growing inequalities and the potential impact of the latest technological revolution, add another dimension, full of challenges and opportunities.

Excellencies,

What is much clearer today than ever before, is that we cannot leave economies, the industrial sector, trade, and value chains out of the equation when we talk about people, planet and prosperity. ISID remains the engine of economic growth, employment and income generation.

During those travels, I spoke to leaders but also to women, young workers, community members, who placed high hopes in UNIDO to provide jobs and better their lives. Seeing the appreciation for our work and hearing the expectations for our continued support brought home the responsibility we have, and left me with a very special feeling that I will not forget.

I could tell you about numerous stories of what I have learnt during those travels, but there is *one* experience that I will not forget and that made me think about the impact of ISID and UNIDO's work on the existences and wellbeing of many young women and men.

I would like to share with you my memories and three photos of the visit to a garment factory, a still very vivid memory and a good example of

how industrial development works, how it changes people's lives for the better.

That experience has been driving me in thinking of concrete ways to create decent jobs for women and young people, to employ them in the formal sector, and generate incomes that pull them out of poverty. It is one of the reasons why I kept pushing for PCPs and the dissemination of best practices under ISID.

Among the people that I spoke to, was this young lady: her family was living in poverty until recently, but with her job at the factory their life changed. She now had a regular income that was enough to even support her family.

On top of that, it turned out that she was among the workers with higher responsibilities. She was so skillful, and she told me with much pride that, after some training, she is now also responsible for quality control — a good example of skills upgrading and the opportunities to grow further.

For me, this is a powerful example showing how UNIDO's programmes can bring large-scale employment with direct impact on the lives of young people and women, putting them in a better position and opening opportunities to develop careers or to become entrepreneurs with the skills they gained.

Excellencies,

The role of industry, industrial development policy, as well as of UNIDO's overall mission, is also vital for decarbonization, circularity and the pursuit of a just transition towards a carbon-neutral society.

Industry is directly responsible for more than one third of global primary energy consumption and energy-related carbon dioxide emissions, including in hard-to-abate sectors such as chemicals, steel and cement.

Industry is also the engine that drives innovative solutions and increased efficiencies. Technological advances in the sector can shift production to clean, resource-efficient and renewable sources and towards circularity in production and consumption, circular economy.

After the conclusion of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP26, in Glasgow, the international community needs to put words into action. As a new UNIDO contribution to climate action, we recently launched the Industrial Deep Decarbonization Initiative. The initiative targets steel and cement production, which is responsible for 14 to 16 per cent of global energy-related CO₂ emissions. Changing the way our societies build, can be a game-changer to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic consequences exacerbated many of the development challenges that countries have faced and confirmed how important industrial development is to address them. As the Industrial Development Report 2022 shows, the ISID mandate plays an important role to resolve these issues.

The pandemic also reminded us of the need to build up manufacturing capacities in least developed countries that can locally and regionally deliver essential goods, such as much needed pharmaceutical and medical products. Since its early days, UNIDO has been concerned with the production, quality control, and transfer of technology in the area of pharmaceuticals. As of 2006, UNIDO has been implementing a programme to strengthen local pharmaceutical production in Africa. With the health industry being a post-pandemic priority, I see a unique opportunity for UNIDO to step up its efforts and partnerships in this area.

Digital technologies and automated processes have already started to change labour markets and created uncertainties about the future of work. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a giant leap in digital transformation and further deepened the digital divide within and among countries.

The Abu Dhabi Declaration adopted by you in 2019 recognizes the fourth industrial revolution as an important area of work in the future of UNIDO. It is clear that the ongoing technological transformation can be the wind beneath the wings of sustainable development, creating opportunities for economic growth and environmental protection.

The fourth industrial revolution is thus another area where I see great potential for UNIDO. We need to harness digital technologies to serve

the world. And I am proud that we already started this process with many good examples. UNIDO will continue supporting its Member States to build the necessary skills, infrastructure, policies and frameworks.

We will be guided by the “UNIDO Strategic Framework for the Fourth Industrial Revolution 2022-2030: Making 4IR work for all” that we have been developing and updating in consultation with you. Document GC.19/11 complemented by conference room paper CRP.7 provide an updated description of UNIDO’s approach.

It is my sincere hope that UNIDO Member States support this endeavour to reap the benefits of digitalization and technologies of the fourth industrial revolution as an enabler and accelerator for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, I would like to thank you, our Member States, most sincerely for the trust you placed in me and in the Organization. It is clear that the achievements of the past years would not have been possible without your contributions, support and guidance.

As the saying goes: “with a friend at your side, no road seems too long”. With the support of our Member States, we managed to walk far, with your continued support I believe we can walk even further.

It has been a special privilege to serve at the helm of UNIDO, and it has been an honour to serve with you all at my side. Looking back at my life journey, my time at UNIDO has been a valuable part, and I am grateful for the many rich experiences and for the change that I hope I could make in people’s lives.

As a member of the UNIDO family, and as head of this Organization, I always felt guided by the wisdom of the philosopher Laozi, who said:

“Go to the people; live with them; work with them; learn from them; love them; start from what they know, and build on what they have.

Then, when the task is accomplished, the people will remark "We have done it ourselves" "

This is the humble approach that we should take, and the leadership model that I sought to follow.

Excellencies,

I am very proud of UNIDO and I think that you can be too.

I am fully confident that UNIDO has a bright future as the premier agency in the United Nations system mandated to advance inclusive and sustainable industrial development and as a valuable member of the United Nations development system.

I am equally confident of your unwavering support to the Organization and its Director General in the years to come, to ensure that UNIDO can fulfill its vital mandate and continue building a better future.

I close with a reference to the statement by the President of the General Conference: let us have a common dream! I hope UNIDO will continue to play a major role in achieving this common dream and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Thank you.