

International Student Energy Summit (ISES) 2015

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The International Student Energy Summit (ISES) 2015 took place in Bali, Indonesia, on June 10-13, cosponsored by Student Energy, a non-profit organization based in Canada's Calgary, and the Bandung Institute of Technology of Indonesia, this year's host country for the international conference. From more than 90 countries, about 600 university and graduate school students interested in energy problems participated in the conference on a registration basis. Following the opening ceremony on June 10, participants had active discussions in five plenary sessions and four parallel sessions, based on panel debates among experts invited from various countries.

The first ISES conference opened in Calgary in 2009 at the initiative of students interested in energy problems. Since then, the conference has been held biennially. The second one came in Canada's Vancouver in 2011 and the third in Norway's Trondheim in 2013. The fourth was the Bali conference. As was frequently pointed out in the latest conference, it is very important and significant for students as future leaders in the world to have great interests in energy and environmental problems in the sense that the world's future is in the hands of the young generation. In this way, it is basically important for young people to have accurate knowledge about energy and environmental problems.

Topics selected for the conference and discussions there led me to think that young students participating in the conference are interested in renewable energy promotion, proactive efforts to address the global warming problem, and advanced and innovative energy technology development and diffusion in connection with their high ideals and hopes regarding energy and environmental problems. From the viewpoint of inequality correction and balanced social development, they impressively indicated their great interests in how to address “energy poverty” for many low-income people having no access to modern energy.

I think that it is natural and desirable for young people to believe that humans should have high ideals and goals in addressing these problems. At the same time, young people must have accurate, objective and neutral information and knowledge about problems in actual society when setting the right ideals and goals. Without such information or knowledge, they could pursue reveries

instead of ideals or go in the wrong direction in pursuit of ideals or goals.

Not only discussions among policy makers, industry players and experts but also understanding by ordinary citizens is important for promoting renewable energy, global warming measures and attaining the best energy mix. Young people who are to bear the future of the world can play a key role in enhancing such understanding. In connection with my 205th special bulletin on “A Japanese Perspective on the International Energy Landscape,” it is desirable for young people to improve their “energy literacy” before pursuing their ideals and goals. ISES is expected to serve as a platform for that purpose.

In this sense, it was significant that discussions on high ideals coincided with those on real problems including crude oil prices’ recent wild fluctuations, the shale revolution underlying the fluctuations, and the importance of fossil fuels. Students’ questions frequently indicated their doubts and concerns about the future course of fossil fuels and dependence on these fuels. In response, many speakers and panelists explained about fossil fuel resources, their economics, relevant technology development and their convenience, contributing to improving young people’s energy literacy. It was impressive that active panel and floor discussions came on the advantages and disadvantages of shale gas development while natural gas as the cleanest fossil fuel attracted attention and became a central topic.

In a plenary session on “Emerging Asia” where I participated, discussions took place on both ideal directions for the Asian energy future, and serious energy problems that Asia has faced and how Asia has addressed these problems. As Indonesia hosted the conference with the center of the international energy market gravity shifting to Asia, Asian energy problems became a dominant topic. This reflected that Asian energy problems have grown even more important as a matter of concern to young people. Students indicated their great hopes on technologies that would bridge the gaps between the present and the future regarding Asian energy and environmental problems, discussing energy conservation, clean coal technologies, renewable energy and other possible technologies. An interesting point was that students’ questions centered on various constraints and challenges on international energy cooperation that would be important for diffusing advanced technologies. Multiple students questioned how the present geopolitical tensions in Asia would affect international cooperation. Impressively, these questions indicated that young people are conscious of “severe realities” in a sense.

Overall, the conference provided very significant discussions for improving energy literacy among young people. My only concern was that students’ interests concentrated excessively on environmental problems with energy security failing to attract attention. While energy security contains complex problems and is difficult to understand, it is the most important among energy challenges. In this sense, energy literacy improvement through balanced discussions on the so-called three E’s -- economic efficiency, energy security and environmental protection -- is important for

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young people and the future of the world.

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