Panel one: Unleashing the green energy potential in the Middle East, North, and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

Speaker bios

H.E. Matthew Opoku Prempeh
Minister for Energy, Ghana

Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh, is the Minister for Energy and the Member of Parliament (MP) for the Manhyia South constituency in the Ashanti Region. He was born on May 23, 1968 in Kumasi, where he went on to have his primary, secondary and tertiary education. At the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), he obtained a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree in Human Biology in 1992 and a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MB,ChB) degree in 1995. After serving as a House Officer at the Okomfo Anoyke Teaching Hospital from 1995 until 1997, Dr. Prempeh continued his education at the Erasmus University in The Netherlands, obtaining an M.Sc in Clinical Epidemiology in 1998. He proceeded to the United Kingdom to work, becoming a member of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow in 2002. He returned to Ghana in 2003 to pursue a career in business and politics. He is also a Harvard Scholar and an alumnus of the Harvard Ministerial Leadership Program. Dr Matthew Opoku Prempeh ran for Parliament on the ticket of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) during the 2008 general election and won the mandate to represent the people of Manhyia. Subsequently, the constituency was divided into two and he went on to become Member of Parliament for the Manhyia South Constituency in 2012. He retained the seat at the 2016 elections and again at the 2020 elections. Following the victory of the NPP in the 2016 general elections, Dr. Prempeh was appointed by President Akufo-Addo as Minister for Education from 2017 to 2021. During his tenure, he successfully led the team at the Ministry to deliver on the flagship education program of the government, the Free Senior High School program, to wide admiration even from his political opponents. His team also delivered curriculum reforms, teacher reforms and several initiatives to promote and mainstream Technical, Vocational Training and Education (TVET). He also secured the approval for the successful recruitment of over 93,725 teaching and non-teaching staff to drastically improve the pupil-teacher ratio at the pre-tertiary level. 2 In the aftermath of the NPP’s victory at the 2020 general elections, President Akufo-Addo nominated Dr. Prempeh to serve as Minister for Energy. He has since championed various major projects including the completion of rural electrification (currently 85.7%) by 2024; renegotiation of Power Agreements; the revamping of Ghana’s cylinder manufacturing company and improvement of the cylinder recirculation model to meet Ghana’s clean energy goals; the establishment of a petroleum hub; revision of local content legislation, improving the efficiency of electricity producers and distributors; and relieving the energy debt stock of Ghana through the Energy Sector Recovery Program (ESRP).

Mai Abdelhalim
President, GE Vernova Africa

Mai Abdelhalim is President, Africa for GE Vernova where she is responsible for coordinating market engagement across GE Vernova’s portfolio of technologies and businesses. Prior to this role, Mai served as President, North Africa for GE International Markets, where she led the acceleration of growth initiatives across Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia. She joined GE in 2017 as Government Affairs and Policy Director for Northeast Africa. Before joining GE, Mai worked as Senior Commercial Advisor in the U.S. Department of Commerce Foreign Commercial Service’s Office at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, and Economic Assistant to the U.S. Consul General in Alexandria. Prior to her work with the U.S. State Department, Mai worked as the Head of the Advocacy Unit at the Alexandria Business Association (ABA). Mai
brings extensive experience in multinational corporations and government stakeholder relations, driving business value for customers across industries and markets. She holds a bachelor’s degree in economics from the University of Alexandria, Egypt, and an MBA from South Wales University in the UK.

Marco Arcelli  
*Chief Executive Officer, ACWA Power*

Marco Arcelli is the Chief Executive Officer and responsible for overseeing the strategy and operations of ACWA Power's growing global footprint and ensuring its continued growth and success worldwide. He is a seasoned C-level executive with over 20 years of international experience in energy and infrastructure, retail, and digital innovation and has played a crucial role in the strategic positioning and growth of multinational companies. As an energy expert, Marco has held various leadership positions, including CEO Enel Trade, EVP Upstream Gas, CEO of Enel’s North American operations, as well as Chairman of EP New Energy. Marco also has in-depth expertise in turn-around and operations, having led two corporate transformations highlighted in case studies by IESE and Harvard Business School. He is also a peer reviewer for the International Energy Agency. He has also made significant contributions in public affairs and government relations, managing policy negotiations at the country and EU level. He is a dedicated advocate of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues and has served as an Audit and HR Committee member for listed companies in Germany and Russia. An active member of numerous Boards, Marco is also a mentor for organizations supporting women in business and young talents. He holds a master’s degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Università degli Studi di Genova, Italy and has completed the Harvard Advanced Management Program.

Ahmed Badr  
*Director, Project Facilitation & Support, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)*

Ahmed Badr is the Director of the International Renewable Energy Agency’s (IRENA) Project Facilitation and Support division (PFS). The division offers member countries dedicated project implementation support. Mr. Badr joined the Agency in April 2020 and brings more than 30 years of international experience in the field of banking and finance. In his role, Mr. Badr is tasked with leading the development of the division by building strong lines of cooperation with development banks and international financial institutions. He also spearheads the Agency’s implementation of the Climate Investment Platform, a multi-stakeholder platform established in partnership with SE4All, the UNDP and in coordination with Green Climate Fund, and manages IRENA’s ongoing relationship with the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development. Prior to joining IRENA, Mr. Badr held several senior operational positions in the field of climate change, renewable energy, energy efficiency, water and infrastructure projects in a number of multinational financial institutions, including the World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Commission (EuropeAid), and Japan Bank for International Cooperation. Mr. Badr is certified a project infrastructure project manager, with a B.Sc in Civil Engineering and Master’s Degree in Infrastructure Economics from the Université de Nantes, France.
Moderator bio

Dr. Racha Helwa  
*Director, empowerME, Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, Atlantic Council*

Racha Helwa is the Director of the empowerME Initiative at the Atlantic Council’s Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East. Helwa is a senior economist with twenty-two years of professional experience in economic-and financial-policy analysis and implementation. She has held roles in the private sector, government, and academia in the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Egypt. She specializes in public-policy design and implementation, sustainable development, impact investing, and private-sector development. Helwa holds a PhD in economic policy from the University of Cambridge, an MSc in international political economics from the London School of Economics, and an MSc in banking, finance, and risk management from the University of Paris. She was formerly an assistant professor of public policy at the American University in Cairo, senior researcher at the University of Cambridge, and senior economist in the Office of Egypt’s Minister of Investment. Helwa also has collaborated with various international institutions including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and Development Programme, and the US Agency for Development. She is fully fluent in English, French, and Arabic.