

SAARC MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON COOPERATION ON ENVIRONMENT - "DELHI STATEMENT"

(Adopted by the Eighth Meeting of the SAARC Environment Ministers)

New Delhi, 20-21 October 2009

The Ministers of Environment of the Member States of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) met in New Delhi, India on 20th October 2009 for the Eighth Meeting of the SAARC Environment Ministers.

Recognizing that one of the mandates of SAARC is to promote and support the protection, management and enhancement of the environment in the South Asian region;

Convinced that SAARC could benefit from exchange of the accumulated positive experience, strengthened regional dialogue and adopting a collaborative regional approach to tackling common environmental problems;

Emphasizing that SAARC can play an important role in carrying out collective action to address these challenges for mutual benefit and the common good;

Underscoring the need to substantively enhance regional cooperation as per SAARC principles on matters related to the environment;

Hereby adopt the Delhi Statement on Cooperation in Environment:

Environmental Planning & Management

1. The Ministers recognized the critical importance of effective planning and management of environmental protection systems, including environmental pollution, and conservation of aquatic and marine ecosystems. They emphasized the need for cooperation in devising measures to develop capability for enhanced environmental management.

2. The Ministers appreciated and acknowledged the support of India in SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC) and reaffirmed the decision of SMRC to set up a network of SAARC weather stations to monitor weather patterns, especially storms, across the Member States, starting with the establishment of fifty automatic weather stations, three GPS Sonde Stations and a Doppler Radar in Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh in the first phase. Afghanistan and Pakistan would be covered in second phase and Maldives and Sri Lanka in the third phase. They directed that the deployment of this network across other Member States be accelerated.

3. The Ministers agreed to accelerate consultations between the apex environmental management and pollution control agencies of the Member States ("apex group"), and directed that they develop a Regional Cooperation Plan on environmental management and pollution control within a period of six months from the date of adoption of this statement.

Biodiversity and Afforestation

4. The Ministers noted the critical need to conserve, preserve, rehabilitate and protect the rich, varied and unique biodiversity of the South Asian region. They noted the need for biodiversity protection and regulation, including through scientific methods.

5. The Ministers re-affirmed the importance of the region's forests as a unique treasure, both for their rich biodiversity and for the livelihood they provide to the forest-dependent people of South Asia. They emphasized the need to give a new impetus to afforestation and the sustainable management of forests and its resources, including through community-based methods.

6. The Ministers emphasized the need to identify transboundary biodiversity zones and develop a framework for transboundary biodiversity conservation, including exploration of potential biodiversity conservation corridors. The Ministers directed the Technical Committee on Environment and Forestry to examine the Concept and develop a framework for consideration of Member States within a period of six months thereof.

7. The Ministers underlined the need for afforestation and sustainable management of forests to be an integral part of any agreement on forestry that is concluded under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). They emphasized that the "REDD Plus" proposal before the UNFCCC is an appropriate basis for such an agreement.

Climate Change

8. The Ministers recognized that the South Asia was amongst the regions most vulnerable to climate change. They stressed that sustainable development and adaptation to Climate Change remained the appropriate way to address the threat of climate change. They agreed that it was central, including through acceleration of the development process, to build up capacity in the region to cope with the extreme weather events and other adverse effects of climate change.

9. The Ministers recalled the SAARC Declaration on Climate Change adopted by the Twenty-ninth Session of the Council of Ministers held in New Delhi on 7-8 December 2007, and emphasized the SAARC Action Plan on Climate Change adopted by the SAARC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change held in Dhaka held on 3 July 2008, wherein specific areas of possible actions by the Member States were identified.

10. The Ministers welcomed the proposal by Bhutan to adopt "Climate Change" as the key theme of the Sixteenth SAARC Summit to be held in Thimphu in April 2010, and took note of the Concept Paper circulated by Bhutan.

11. The Ministers underlined the crucial importance of close cooperation in the run-up to the UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP-15) in Copenhagen, with a view to enabling the full, effective and sustained implementation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). They also underscored the need to fully implement the commitments under the Convention in accordance with its principles, especially that of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.

12. The Ministers also noted the importance of the High Level Conference on Technology Development and Transfer organized by the Government of India in cooperation with UNDESA and expressed hope that this will be an important contribution to the agreed outcomes at Copenhagen.

13. The Ministers recommended that Member States may undertake cooperation with respect to adaptation, supported with resources as mutually agreed, to address the adverse effects of climate change.

14. In particular, the Ministers underscored the need to undertake and enhance cooperation in areas related to environment amongst the Member States in order to have a coordinated response to climate change. To this end, the Ministers agreed to institutionalize an annual workshop – a South Asia Workshop on Climate Change Actions (SAWCCA). The Ministers welcomed the offer of the Government of India to host the first workshop in early 2010.

Cross-cutting measures for cooperation

15. The Ministers further agreed on a series of cross-cutting measures for mutual cooperation between Member States across areas of the environment:

- Strengthen mechanisms at policy, practice and implementation level to take better account of the indirect, induced, cross-sectoral and cross-boundary impacts, based on best practices available in the SAARC region and beyond;
- Identify and create opportunities for activities achievable through regional cooperation and south-south support in terms of technology and knowledge transfer;
- Agree to continued sharing of experience within SAARC for development of common approach to the environmental challenges; through workshops, seminars, conferences and expositions, training programmes and to foster the regional cooperation on priority environmental issues;
- Exchange Students and Faculty between Universities and Research Institutions of Member States.

16. The Ministers took note of the Draft SAARC Treaty on Cooperation in the field of Environment, and directed that an Inter-governmental Expert Group Meeting be convened at an early date to discuss and finalize the draft Treaty for signature at the forthcoming Sixteenth SAARC Summit.

17. The Ministers directed that the draft SAARC Agreement on Natural Disaster Rapid Response Mechanism be finalized for signing at the Sixteenth SAARC Summit at Thimphu, Bhutan, in April 2010.

18. The Ministers appreciated the offer by the Government of India to provide US\$ 1 million each to the SAARC Forestry Centre, Thimphu and the SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre, Malé to strengthen those Centres.

19. The Ministers expressed deep appreciation to the Government of India for hosting the Eighth Meeting of the SAARC Environment Ministers and for the warm hospitality extended to all the delegations.
