

Opening Remarks of Mr. Asif S. Khan, Director General, Pak-EPA.

Mr. Javed Hasan Aly, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Mr. Surendra Shrestha, Regional Director, UNEP/RRC AP, distinguished guests, ladies & gentlemen.

I welcome you all here in the first meeting of the National Stakeholders Forum under the Malé Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and its Likely Transboundary Effects for South Asia. I particularly welcome the honorable Chief Guest who always supports Pak-EPA. Despite his commitments, the Secretary agreed to chair this workshop. I am grateful to you sir, for sparing your valuable time.

The Malé Declaration, is the product of policy dialogue organized by UNEP and after the fire in Indonesia, the Transboundary effect was felt greatly and there was concern shown that the Transboundary effect is affecting the economy of the country. Mr. Surendra Shrestha, the person behind the whole scene; he took it up and phase I of Malé Declaration was started and focal points were declared. Malé Declaration, Phase I was focusing mainly on awareness raising and collecting information by making National reports. So every country developed its national report and Pakistan also prepared its report and that report was appreciated. This was followed by Phase II of Malé Declaration. That includes establishment of continuous monitoring stations. Unfortunately, Pakistan lagged behind as a country although now the equipment has been received in Pakistan and customs clearance is being done here. The purpose was to study Transboundary effects particularly during the Monsoon when the air from one country is transported to the other and causes the phenomenon of acid rain or formation of some nuclides; which shall be studied. I hope now the things are in line and we would be able to complete the formalities of phase II. The phase III, which is also in its final stage is where the issue would be tackled. The Transboundary issue is getting importance and you might be aware of The Atmospheric Brown Cloud issue. ABC is not only present in Asia, it also present in other regions of the world. So this issue is getting importance and further studies are also being carried out.

In Pakistan, we have a very serious issue of haze formation, which needs to be given much attention because haze formation is a subject which is not easy to understand. There are so many complex reactions, which takes place because of the

presence of nuclides in air, but the main thing is sulphate, which comes from sulphur in diesel, oil and other sources and nitrogen oxides that form nitrates which emerges as small particles and then leads to ozone formation. The activated carbon, the elemental carbon ; these things leads to haze formation in air. The problem with haze is that on one hand it fades out all the colors and one cannot enjoy the beauty of nature. The other important issue is about health. Haze is considered to be a very serious issue because of its health implication. Respiratory illness is a product of haze formation. Then fog ; in Pakistan, the fog issue, for a couple of years, has started affecting our economy. Many flights are cancelled. Even this time the motorway between Lahore & Islamabad was closed due to heavy fog. Experts say that fog formation is also linked with haze. It produces an ideal scientific reason for the ground level formation of fog, because nuclides plays a part in the formation of fog . A five degree differential of dew point, a clear and still sky; this is the ideal situation for fog formation. Now for the last two years, we have very clear weather in winter, which also gives rise to fog. But in all these air pollution issues, the bottom line is to control pollution and that comes from motor vehicles, industries etc. These are the sources and there are some natural effects like dust, for which we have to stabilize ground level loose dust. The issue of particular matter is very serious in Pakistan and the levels of SPM in air have gone to 6~7 times than WHO standards. In Multan side where there is high aridity level, the level of suspended particulates has gone up to 1000 mg/m³ as compared to 150 mg/ m³ of WHO standards.

Sir, your presence here would help in the initiatives to stop formation of haze and ultimately its products. For this there is a need for very strong institutions. There is a need for more extensive studies. In Baluchistan, Quetta, flights have been cancelled because of dust particles. This phenomenon has been seen for the last two years. This could be the transboundary effect from Afghanistan or somewhere else. There is a need to have some regional studies on this part also.

Sir, the problem of air pollution is not localized; it is a regional problem and it needs a forum like the Malé Declaration, which provides a good opportunity where regional countries could work on such issues and to work with UNEP very closely for the future, and particularly on the issues associated with the Malé Declaration.

I once again thank you all, particularly my colleagues Ms. Naw Wah Wah, Mr. Iyngararasan and Mr. Surendra Shrestha, who have come all the way from UNEP.

I hope your stay in Pakistan would be comfortable and you would be able to find time to see beautiful Pakistan.

I thank you Mr. Secretary for being with us.