

Attachment IV

Mr. Surendra Shrestha, Regional Director, UNEP, Opening Remarks

Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Director General, distinguished participants and guests.

With your permission Sir, I would like to present a macro view and build on what our Director General has just mentioned and then look at the impacts and then some policy implications.

First, if we look at recent history, if we go back 5000 years or so, we were mainly doing agriculture and using our own muscle power and were involved in domestication of both plants and animals; that was our main pre-occupation. During this period, mankind respected laws of nature and we lived in close harmony with nature, more or less. Then when we come to the 150 years of industrial revolution; we exploited natural resources, built bigger and faster machines to do that exploitation and to produce consumer goods and in the process, generated lot of waste and we consumed the goods which again produced lots of waste. So during this period, I think we were not looking at the laws of nature. We were exploiting it and disturbing the laws of nature and all the gurus and scientists tells us that if we look at the future and if we reach there, we have another 5000 years for it. Our main pre-occupation at that time will be knowledge and wisdom. We would be able to crack the DNA code and have everything what we need; goods and services will be produced not by large factories, but by tinkering with molecules and atoms. But before we reach there, I think the big concern is the recent 150 years where we were pre-occupied with producing, consuming and following the old growth model which focuses only on the economy. We are going to disturb the cycle and the latest studies of IPCC , have predicted that we have about two generation time before we can take corrective measures.

This planet is very sick; land, air, water; any aspect that we look at. The scientific reports show very disturbing trends. The current scientific knowledge shows that we either need to migrate to Moon or Mars or this will be the future of our children or grand children. If we look at some of the manifestation, some of which the Director General has mentioned, we are releasing pollutants more than that nature can absorb; hence we having all these impacts. I just mentioned a few. I noticed some colleague from Japan. In Japan, this year, there were so far a total of 16 climatic

events that only happen once in 100 years and it has caused billions of dollars of damage. Same is true in Philippines; 25 climatic events that happen once in 50 years. Closer to home, our glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalayas are retreating up to 50 meters per year and if we look again at the macro view from the Mekong, Brahmaputra, the Ganges, Indus, the two rivers in P. R. China and the two rivers in Central Asia; all originating from this mountain range and if we project this 50 meters retreat for another 50 years, it is going to have a grave impact on more than half the population of the world that lives down stream. So there are grave implications.

The ABC again was mentioned by the Director General; we have now changed the name from Asian Brown Cloud to Atmospheric Brown Cloud, after the political level discussion and now there is an impact study being done scientifically. Yes, it impacts health, crops yield; there is up to 20% sun light being cut out during the dry season in the main continent of Asia and with the reduction in sun light, there is a reduction in photosynthesis, there is a reduction in crop yield, impacting the food security. It is impacting the water budget along the eastern coast from Shanghai to Jakarta; more rain than usual. And these are the particulates and aerosols acting in the clouds and as the clouds move into the inner area of the continent, we will have little rain or continuous droughts and we will see the results in dust and sand storms and other issues.

If we look at the WHO report on health impacts each year; WHO estimates half a million deaths due to air pollution. So these impacts are huge and we need to act, not because we have external pressures, but because we as citizens or as individuals, our families are being affected and we need to act urgently.

At the national level, all the countries in this region are looking at economic growth but in recent discussions, we see that either we can have a sustained growth at a lower level or we can maximize growth. It is like get rich now hopefully, clean up later. But with population growing from 6 billion to the 9 billion projected in the next decade and our planet not getting any bigger and the resources that are there; land, water, biodiversity remaining the same, we do not have such luxury and hence a slower growth but a sustained growth is something that I think the political leadership needs to look at. And also from the government side, most of our countries are following a similar model globally where we are looking at 3 to 5 years of planning. Our Planning Commissions, our ministries need to look at 30~50 years, a longer time horizon than just 3~5 years. So at the global level, I think we have a very good model

and a good example. I think the Montreal Protocol is an excellent example that has worked that is showing result, where the science developed first, then came the global political agreement and also the agreement between the developed and the developing countries to build capacity and to act together. So we have the Montreal Protocol as a very good example.

At the regional level, the Director General mentioned the haze after the 1997 fire; we have the Asian haze agreement. This is a legally binding agreement that was first of its kind. We have EANET along East Asia; 12 countries participating with over 200 monitoring stations and then the Malé Declaration in South Asia being implemented in Phase I, II and III of which the Director General has mentioned.

While we discuss the technicalities and the scientific side, in order not to lose sight of the bigger picture, I on behalf of UNEP would like to recommend three areas that we need to persuade our governments so as to take our policies more towards prevention. We have been very good at reacting, We get sick, we go to the doctor; we take medicine and take rest. We have pollution we look at it and try to react; can we put legal measures in place? It is all reactive policy. Where we have the science and the knowledge can we not look at a prevention policy? Like keeping our health in order with exercise, good food healthy diet, so that the need to go to the doctor is less. We know that urbanization will be the mega issue for this region. More and more people are moving from rural to urban areas. We will have over 400 million middle class in Asia within six years: a projection from the demographer's side. With this middle class; they want a house, a car and if they want to live like citizens of USA may be two cars, and the Director General mentioned about the vehicular pollution. There are a total of 120 million vehicles estimated globally and 400 million more being added; imagine the magnitude of the pollution from the vehicles alone, let alone the manufacturing side and the technical side of it. So towards prevention, can we not look at zero emission houses? can we not encourage hybrid vehicles, cleaner vehicles? I understand there is a 400 % tax structure here. Could not the government lower tax to 200% for environmental friendly vehicles? Yes, they are little bit more expensive, but for a person if it is an equal amount, I am sure people will choose environmental friendly vehicles.

Secondly, we are again following the linear path, when we look at consumption of natural resources. We have industry, we produce consumer goods, we produce waste and more waste after we have consumed; it is a linear path. Could we

not learn from the laws of nature to go circular? In Japan, recently the 3 R's was promoted by legislation – reduce, re-use and recycle ; every company in Japan is required by law to do this. China is institutionalizing the circular economy from the federal level down to the county level. So there are home grown paths to sustainable development and we need to look at that.

Thirdly, regional cooperation as the Director General mentioned; environment does not stop at national borders, we need to look at promoting regional cooperation. I think with the Islamabad declaration of the SAARC summit, held here for the first time, there is a paragraph on environment. We need to take further, what the political leaders have done to promote environment across South Asia and beyond. Yes, with capacity building and technology transfer to strengthen our institutions, not only for policy making but also for policy enforcement and implementation.

In conclusion, I wish to thank all the participants. I also wish to thank our partners who are not here, the SEI, Sida and SACEP. I also wish to thank our other partners who are working with us, IUCN & UNDP, who are here with us; the Director General for hosting this meeting, he has been with us, with the Malé Declaration from the start and I wish to thank you for your dedication. We hope that the implementation, although a little bit, as you mentioned, late in Pakistan, we can catch up and implement now and do it better especially in the IIIrd phase and also wish to thank the Secretary. I think under your guidance, we as UNEP together with other UN agencies wish to promote this regional cooperation and with your advice & guidance, we need to do more and look forward for your guidance, Sir. Thank you.