

# Addressed by Mr. C. Suriyakumaran, Director Regional Office and Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific, UNEP

On behalf of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Dr. Mostafa K. Tolba, and on my own behalf, I wish to express my deep and sincere thanks today for the opportunity you have given me to address you. To you, Sir, as the distinguished Prime Minister of this country, we are particularly grateful for the inspiration the practical wisdom and guidance that you have given us in your inauguration of this Meeting of Ministers for the establishment of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme. These are gifts which those who know you have come readily to expect of you and to value from you. But we are grateful also for another reason. This is the great strength that you have lent to SACEP simply by your being here with us. By so doing, I have no doubt that you have also committed the force of your leadership to this stage of initial nurturing and growth of an undertaking of great importance. I am sure all of us here remain beholden to you for this and for the strength that we shall draw from the assurance of your interest in the establishment and future of this organisation.

Sir, this is an occasion of great moment. It is so, not because we are meeting on environment, important as it is, but because of the cooperation that it has now forged. Perhaps it is fortunate that the cause of the environment, the basis for millenia past and to come, of our survival and our future, was the means for this culmination of the idea of sub-regional cooperation for South Asia, which you Mr. Prime Minister have bid us witness today. We have come to the point where arrangements for setting up this co-operation can now be made. It was not something that took place suddenly. The Inter-Governmental Expert Group Meeting held in Bangalore, India, 10-15 March 1980 was an important stage, in a process that began before it and followed through later. The countries represented here had given considerable attention to the matters involved, through exchanges of ideas and consultations, over a period of time. In the course of progress with this, countries saw common interests and faced similar challenges to their prosperity and to prospects for their future, arising from the neglect of the past. They perceived clear opportunities to overcome the threats to attainment of a sustainable and better future. That road was travelled, before arriving at the High Level Meeting starting today. In the course of doing so, as the Bangalore Meeting pointed out, a spirit of cooperation also became manifest that, it was sure, would endure. That spirit must be reckoned an outstanding outcome of the Bangalore Meeting.

These are not unknown to you. The Bangalore Meeting, as the immediate precursor to the present High Level Meeting, also provided a clear practical basis for the cooperation that it envisaged. I shall not go into the details of this, except to touch on them briefly in relation to the work of the Meeting of Senior Officials concluded last week, in preparation for this Meeting of the Ministers.

Before I do so, perhaps I may pause to emphasize a vital assumption in the concerns and opportunities of the environment, as the Meeting in Bangalore saw it. Behind the identification of the environmental constraints and of the needs for action was an outstanding realization, that these were the concerns not merely of the environment but of development itself. The areas that were selected for mutual cooperation among the countries were seen also as of fundamental importance to the advancement of national development and welfare: the 'conservation of resources' in wise environment management become, indeed, a partnership in the 'conservation of development'. In many places and over many areas and over long periods, huge resources had been irrationally exhausted, depleted, deteriorated, unused, in the process of production, as also through poverty, in all our countries. It happened across sectors, in agriculture, in industry, in infrastructures, in human settlements; in the mountains and rangelands, the forests, pastures and farms, the coasts and the offshores. There had been also a dramatic neglect, although now being realized only through the energy crisis, in the use of our renewable resources and residues — agricultural, industrial and municipal — which could have, and would have, provided major answers to our current concerns of stabilising the environment and equally of meeting some of the most serious economic problems in supplies of fuel, food, fodder, fertilizer, industrial materials and materials for construction. It has come to be seen beyond doubt, from the Himalayan ecosystem at one end, to the Indian Ocean at the other, that the 'environment-resources-development' relationship is an essential one and inseparable one; one which has to be pursued by urgent national, as well as co-operative, action

among the countries. As a result, co-operation for environment involving the three components implied in this action — of the restoration of resources, ways and means of maintaining resources while utilising them, and the enlargement of resource supplies for our economies by tapping renewable and reusable resources — become far more than idle pre-occupations peripheral to the mainstream of poverty amelioration and rapid development. Thus in whatever areas identified for cooperation under SACEP and in whatever forms of co-operation chosen as instruments, all of them have one aim, namely contribution to the stability of the resources of the region and the maximization of development and welfare of the peoples.

Sir, I mentioned that I shall come back briefly to the concrete conclusions of the Bangalore Meeting. As a result of its deliberations, the Meeting formulated the outlines of a practical plan of action. It agreed to establish SACEP; to acknowledge the offer of the Sri Lanka delegation on behalf of the Government to provide facilities for the Secretariat of the Coordinating Committee of SACEP; and that all countries of the South Asia region would extend their help. It also identified programme areas, as well as focal points in countries, in each case with region-wide responsibility for given subject areas of the programme.

In furtherance of its decisions it also set out certain brief guidelines on the Coordinating Committee Secretariat and Focal Points. It urged assistance from all interested co-operating countries and other related bodies. Above all, it had 'no doubt that the spirit of co-operation manifested would endure'.

It is on these foundations and recommendations that the High Level Meeting of Officials last week, and of Ministers today, has been convened. I am very happy to report that the Meeting of Officials successfully accomplished the tasks that were assigned to it. It has provided clear recommendations on the arrangements for the Coordinating Committee, the Focal Points and the SACEP Secretariat; has identified select priorities in the programme area, which are also concrete, development related and of benefit to member countries as a whole; and has thoroughly examined the ways and possibilities of providing both immediate and sustained financial and technical support to SACEP. It has made these recommendations in its succinct report submitted to the Ministers and which is now before this Meeting. I commend this to the Meeting and have no doubt that it will receive the attention it deserves.

Your Officials' Meeting also acted on two matters on your behalf in the first phase of clearing ideas. It has outlined a Draft Declaration on the establishment of SACEP a matter which was recommended by the Bangalore Meeting for consideration at this 'High Level Meeting. It has also, in similar manner, considered the question of the main official or officials, designations and nominations as appropriate, in a spirit of consensus and friendly cooperation.

These matters are before you now, with a recommendation by the Meeting of Officials for a broad endorsement of their deliberations as expressed in their report; and for consideration and adoption as appropriate, of the suggested Draft Declaration and their recommendations on staffing.

Before I conclude, I wish to be allowed to advert to a point that I mentioned at the Meeting of Officials last week and indicated that I would take up briefly at this Meeting. This is the role that we expect to be played by the international community at large, in particular the interested developed co-operating countries and international global and regional financing institutions and related bodies. I want to emphasize strongly to these countries and bodies, in particular to those that have not been able to be present with us today, the importance of undertaking serious appraisal of the current, largely *ad hoc*, structure and quantum of their support to objectives such as we have today before you. They are objectives that go beyond 'peace-keeping', to 'peace-building'; and replace incomparably larger funds staked out during crises, with much less provided before they occur. I mentioned last week at the Officials' Meeting that positive ideas and intentions for special financing to developing countries have, indeed, come from certain developed countries themselves, some even pioneering these ideas. I should mention two such instances, even though the first one of these still awaits translation into Governmental decision.

A United States report officially commissioned by the President, entitled 'The Global 2000 Report to the President' submitted last year, warned against serious stresses to the world's resources and environment within the next two decades; with the outlook for many of the poor being worse than now, and life for most on earth more precarious than now, unless the nations of the world act decisively. It considered an era of unprecedented co-operation and commitment essential and recommended the need for the United States itself to co-operate 'generously and justly' with other nations. It affirmed that there were many unfulfilled opportunities for this co-operation in efforts to relieve poverty, hunger, pressure of population and economic and environmental productivity.

The other country, Sweden, has proposed that additional funds should be mobilized to strengthen environmental activities in the developing countries. At the last annual Governing Council session of UNEP last year, Sweden stated that 'its Government was prepared to make substantial additional contributions to support increased efforts by UNEP in developing countries'. It also indicated that in

doing so, it would expect 'other countries to be prepared to do the same'. Sweden repeated this offer at the summer session of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations last July in Geneva; and reiterated it again, at the Special Session of the General Assembly held late last year, also expressing the hope that such additionality in funding support would soon be 'operational'.

While these are from outside our region and therefore I have referred to them first, I should mention a step taken by one country, right among us, calling for very special recognition. This is the ready offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the Governing Council Session of UNEP last year, to consider making available financial resources for regional environmental programmes and activities in the SACEP region. In doing so, Iran also called on other countries to join in such a step and assured UNEP of its great interest and further co-operation in environmental matters of this region.

Honourable Prime Minister, Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen, I have consciously sought to make myself brief, as befitting the occasion. It is not a moment at which I should choose to say more than I had felt was essential. In closing, may I echo the words of my Executive Director in his Message to you. The proposed co-operation and the proposed organisational arrangements are pioneering in their nature, reflect the great concerns of development in our region and the commitment of our national leadership to it. The experience of working together could also be a basis for the future in a widening horizon of co-operation. SACEP as a structure, thus represents as much the expression of a co-operative will, as it is of a sound and beneficial programme for the countries. The asks themselves constitute a worthy cause, fully capable of attainment. Our large populations and the poverty of our peoples call for no less.

In this spirit and in all humility, I wish this Meeting every success and extend the assurances of our full support in all the decisions that it may make in fulfilment of these goals.

I thank you.