

Malé Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and Its Likely Transboundary Effects for South Asia

Introduction & Background to the project

Air pollution is an emerging environmental issue in Asia as it is in other parts of the developing world. In particular, emissions of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides have been rising steadily over the past few decades. In addition, rapid growth of cities, together with associated expansion of industry and transport systems, has made the Asian region increasingly concerned with these emissions.

On 19 and 20 March 1998 senior government officials and experts on air pollution met at the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand, and agreed on a draft Declaration. **On 22 April 1998 the Malé Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and Its Likely Transboundary Effects for South Asia was discussed and signed by Ministers of the Environment at the seventh meeting of the Governing Council of South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) in Malé, Republic of Maldives. The Governing Council meeting was inaugurated by his Excellency Hon.Mr.Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, president of the Republic of Maldives and attended by Ministers of Environment and High level policy makers of countries in South Asian region. This was the first regional agreement of its kind not only in the South Asia but also in the developing world. The initiative was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, SIDA , as a part of the Regional Air pollution in Developing Countries (RAPIDC) programme.**

The aim of the Declaration is to achieve intergovernmental Cooperation to address the increasing threat of transboundary air pollution and consequential impacts. The Declaration also calls for the continuation of this process with mutual consultation, to draw up and implement national and regional action plans and protocols based on a fuller understanding of transboundary air pollution issues. The implementation of the Malé Declaration was envisaged to be in phases.

SACEP's Activities

Fostering collaboration with the UNEP-RRC.AP,Sida and SEI , SACEP participated in ensuring the National Implementation Networks, compilation of the baseline status of the monitoring

mechanisms in the region and regional action plan for implementation of the Declarartion during the phase 1 (year 1998- 2000)

Phase 2 (year 2002 – 2004) activities of the project established a monitoring network in the region and strong network of such monitoring assured with the cooperation and collaboration from the member countries to share the existing facilities and capabilities in the region.

Phase 3 of the project (year 2005- up todate) continued to address the Capacity Building activities and a strong network through involving wider group of stakeholders. These activities aimed at regional and national level capacity building and explore venues to partnership with agencies for the suggestions from the Regional Stakeholders Forums.

The 9th Intergovernmental Meeting (IG) and The Fourth Regional Stakeholders cum Coordination meeting of the project was held in Bandos, Maldives from 1- 3 October 2007. The meeting was attended by the Ministries of Environment (NFP) and National Implementing Agencies (NIA) of the participating countries, members of Monitoring Committee (MoC), South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and an independent facilitator. At the meeting the need for better networking and improved awareness building about air pollution related issues was identified . It was also expressed that the participating countries have to take greater ownership of the project, especially in terms of financial support for the implementation of Malé Declaration

The draft proposal for implementing Phase IV of the Malé Declaration was presented at the meeting .The proposal was developed based on a series of consultations with the participating countries, culminating in a final consultation at an Exchange programme with the Project Managers of the Malé Declaration. Proposed Phase IV activities include 3 key components: (i) continuation of the capacity building activities initiated thus far; (ii) conduct an assessment of the impact of air pollution; and (iii) policy developments for control and prevention.

The draft Work Programme in 2008 for Malé Declaration (Malé Declaration/IG 9/6) was also presented The meeting suggested that in the next 2 years more focus might be given to air pollution prevention.It was agreed that the Secretariat will develop a calendar of events under the Malé Declaration and share with the NFPs and NIAs.

ROLE OF SACEP AND SOME CRITICAL ISSUES

Right from the very start it was envisaged that the capacity building of SACEP to handle the Malé declaration would be undertaken, but over the years no such initiatives were taken up by UNEP that was initially made the secretariat of Malé Declaration. This serious concern was raised by SACEP at the Programme Management Committee Meeting (PMC) of Malé Declaration held in Stockholm on 22nd May 2006. SACEP had informed the Programme Management Committee (PMC) that it requires capacity building in the remaining period of phase III in order not only to play an active and meaningful role in the Malé Declaration but also to take up the role of Secretariat in the next phase. SIDA the sole funding agency of Malé Declaration also expressed deep concern about the present role of SACEP at the Malé Declaration and expressed its clear views that they will prefer SACEP as their preferred contractual partner in Phase IV as SACEP is seen by SIDA as being a regional body in South Asia . The 8th Intergovernmental Meeting held on September 13th 2006 at Thimpu, Bhutan, though agreeing on UNEP carrying out as the Secretariat in the balance IIIrd phase, again emphasized that the Capacity Building of SACEP should be undertaken in the balance period of the IIIrd phase and that Phase III should be a transitional Phase and regional partners should take a coordination role in order to enhance the ownership in the region. However at the PMC meeting held in Stockholm, Sweden in May 2007, the UNEP representative made it clear that

they will not ensure capacity building of SACEP as they do not want to duplicate the secretariat.

ROLE OF SACEP REINFORCED

The Honorable Ministers of the member countries of SACEP expressed their concern at the 10th Governing Council of SACEP held in Katmandu, Nepal on 25th January 2007 and observed that “ Capacity Building of SACEP” should be ensured during the phase III. Further the “Kathmandu Declaration” adopted at the 10th Governing Council of SACEP also urged UNEP and other International agencies to provide full support, including financial and technical support to the SACEP secretariat.

Inspite of all the emphasis during all the above meetings and constant persuasion by SACEP, no initiatives have been undertaken by UNEP that is the present secretariat of Malé Declaration project towards capacity building of SACEP. Therefore, it is requested to enable SACEP to deliver an effective co-ordination role in the implementation of the Malé Declaration, since it is basically an initiative taken by the Honorable Ministers of the member countries of SACEP at the 7th Governing Council of SACEP. we need an effective capacity building initiative by UNEP immediately in the balance period of the IIIrd phase so that the SACEP is fully geared to take up the role of the Secretariat in the phase IV of the Malé Declaration and be an agreement partner with SIDA as desired by the donor.

SACEP requests the Governing Council to ensure that the Male Project, being implemented in the South Asian countries be done through SACEP as it was envisaged right in the beginning when the Hon’ Ministers adopted the Male Declaration at the 7th GC of SACEP. It is also requested that the stand of the representatives attending the Inter-government meetings of the Male Declaration may not be contrary to the decisions of the Governing Council and that they should be clear that Male declaration should be implemented by the Regional Inter-government body of SACEP