

**Opening Remarks of Dr. Abas Basir, Director General, SACEP
At SWITCH-Asia Regional Networking Event on 21st September 2018,
Bangkok. Thailand**

Representative of European Union,
Representatives of UN Environment,
Excellencies,
Distinguish Invitees,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today at the Regional Networking Event under the SWITCH-Asia programme. On behalf of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme, please allow me to extend my gratitude to the organizers for inviting SACEP to this very important event.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Sustainable Consumption and Production is not new to Asia as our ancient society practiced it for centuries. But, due to the rapid growth of population and for meeting their basic needs, society had to produce more and more goods which eventually lead to the unsustainable path. On the other hand, our consumption patterns have been changed drastically, during last few decades. In this context, our daily decisions as consumers and producers, multiplied by billions, have a colossal impact on the environment.

Ladies and gentlemen;
Each time, the choice is ours. What we can learn from these observations is that there is an urgent need for a substantial reduction of pressures on the environment and that this reduction of pressures can only be brought about with a substantial redesign of production as well as consumption patterns.

It is time for change. Time to redesign the way we live, consume and produce. To look sustainable consumption and production not as an end goal, but rather, as a vision of pathways that can help meet the needs of all citizens without destroying the environment or meeting dead-ends. Changes in production alone can't make the difference we expect. Those changes in production have to be accompanied by a shift in our consumer model. Making consumption patterns sustainable is one of the greatest current challenges we faced in Asia and South Asia in particular.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme also known as SACEP is an intergovernmental organization, established in 1982 by the governments of South Asia to promote coordination between the member countries, support protection, management and enhancement of the environment in the region and to closely work with the national, regional and international institutions and organization. Our member countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Its Secretariat is based in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

South Asia, home to a quarter of the world's middle-class consumers, experiencing a long period of robust economic growth, averaging 6 per cent over the past 20 years. This strong growth has translated into declining poverty and sustainable development gains. It is a diverse region, home to about 1.64 billion people (24% of the world's population) experiencing a demographic dividend. While our region is expected to reach its population peak by 2030, continued population growth, paired with increases in production and household consumption from increasing economic prosperity will also place increased

pressure on the environment, making the need to shift towards resource efficiency and Sustainable Consumption and Production.

Today, our region is at a crossroads, poised to integrate sustainability to ensure a more resource efficient growth path for its countries. By understanding these developments, in 2013, the Governing Council of SACEP in which the environment Ministers of member countries are members, adopted a decision to promote SCP within policymaking mechanisms of South Asian countries. In translating this decision to actions, SACEP in partnership with UNEP established a South Asia Forum on SCP which is a policy dialogue forum where member countries can share their experiences and discuss how we can act together to achieve SCP in the region. With the recommendation of this South Asia Forum on SCP, SACEP, implemented a number of activities in collaboration with UN Environment to promote Sustainable Consumption and Production in South Asia. Among them, Training of Trainers, capacity building on Tertiary Education and Tourism sectors, conducting Winter School Training Programme on the Sustainable Consumption and Production, are commendable. Considering the demand coming from our member countries, we understood that lot more need to be done. The areas identified by the member countries at the South Asia Forum on SCP where they need SACEP assistance are:

- Capacity building on the use of SCP tools and platforms to share experiences and knowledge exchange on best practices;
- Technical assistance such as providing comprehensive guidelines on mainstreaming SCP in national policies, strengthening national and regional SCP indicator system, and providing strategic environmental assessment and policy support for National SCP plans

- Special emphasis needs to be given to sectors of Sustainable Public Procurement; Sustainable Tourism; Sustainable Transport; and Sustainable Building and Construction.

SACEP and UN Environment co-hosted a South Asia Training and Policy Dialogue on Sustainable Public Procurement on last Monday and Tuesday at the C-ASEAN Building where senior officials of Environment, Finance and other stakeholders from eight SACEP member countries participated. The event was funded by the European Union's SWITCH-Asia Regional Policy Advocacy. Let me share with you some of the recommendations made at the end of the event.

- SACEP to play a role of regional coordinator in building national capacities on policies and action plans on SPP
- Establish a Task Force at South Asia Forum on SCP to prepare a strategy on SPP with targets and outcome indicators
- United Nations Environment and European Union's SWITCH-Asia programme to continue to provide technical assistance, institutional support and assist South Asia Forum on SCP under SACEP in resource mobilization for SPP
- Need to conduct national as well as regional awareness building and training programs, including training of trainers, and build training resources to promote SPP on a programmatic basis
- Develop regional eco-labels on priority products towards harmonization and cost reduction
- Build a regional Community of Practice with knowledge hub of key stakeholders engaged in SPP for knowledge sharing
- Promote cooperation between countries to mentor each other by sharing of experiences on SPP through exchange of officials and professionals

Colleagues,

This is a huge demand from the countries who are having one fourth of world's population. If we can facilitate these demands, we are pretty much making significant impact on our environment.

In order to guide or transform our society into a more resource efficient society, SWITCH-Asia programme of European Union is playing a vital role in this region. Since recent past, SACEP has been involving in implementing a number of joint activities with UNEP under the SWITCH-Asia regional policy support component. We also know that a number of our member countries being supported under the SWITCH-Asia programme on national projects. While thanking European Union for supporting us so far, I take this opportunity to invite them to work collaboratively with SACEP in future in implementing SCP related activities in South Asia.

At last, I would like to emphasize that the shift towards sustainable and responsible lifestyles is a pre-requisite to the achievement of sustainable development. Changing behaviours – and in particular motivating more sustainable behaviours – is far from straightforward. Individual behaviours are deeply embedded in social and institutional contexts. We are guided as much by what others around us say and do, and by the 'rules of the game' as we are by personal choice. We often find ourselves 'locked in' to unsustainable behaviours in spite of our own best intentions. In this context consumer education is vital to achieve Sustainable Consumption and production.

Once again, I thank the organizers, particularly EU for organizing this very important event. I hope, our efforts towards Sustainable Consumption and

Production direct us to policies and activities that result in the realizing of Sustainable Development Goals.

Thank you.