

Speech made by
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Framework Convention on Climate Change
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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I consider it an honour and a privilege to have got the opportunity to address this historic Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

I take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Interim Secretariat of the Convention for the excellent preparatory work that had gone into organising this Conference. I also would like to convey our congratulations to you Madam Chairperson on being elected to this most prestigious position.

Sri Lanka considers the issue of climate change as a most crucial challenge facing humans, threatening our very survival. In response, the Government of Sri Lanka has taken several measures, both policy initiatives and practical steps, towards reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Sri Lanka was a signatory to the Convention when it was opened for signature at the Earth Summit meeting held in Rio in 1992. We were among the first 50 countries to have ratified the Convention, the minimum number that was required for it to enter into force. This was a clear indication of our commitment to join hands with other nations around the world in dealing with global environmental issues.

In 1992, my Ministry appointed an Interministerial Coordinating Committee to coordinate climate change activities in the country. This Committee chaired by the Secretary to my Ministry, which is the national focal point for the Convention, has taken several positive steps in addressing various issues related to climate change.

With the convention entering into force last year, my Ministry advises all relevant Ministries of the implications of the Convention and urged them to take policy measures that would result in the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions.

Sri Lanka believes that environmental issues of nature of climate change will have to be addressed collectively, particularly at regional level. Such programmes will not only be of mutual benefit to countries in the region, but will also strengthen the effectiveness of the Asian Region in international consultations. Sri Lanka is a signatory to the Manila Declaration on Climate Change, adopted at the Asia-Pacific Leaders Conference on Climate Change held recently in Manila.

In 1992, as a part of a study undertaken by the South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), Sri Lanka prepared its first inventory of greenhouse gas emissions. During 1993, Sri Lanka joined 7 other Asian Countries in a study sponsored by the Asian Development Bank to investigate the socioeconomic impacts of Climate Change. This study revealed that Sri Lanka's economy, being agriculture based and dependent on coastal industries including tourism, is very much vulnerable to the anticipated climate change. Our Government is now studying this report on order to formulate a suitable response strategy.

This study further reveals that, Sri Lanka's agriculture, coastal regions and the economy in general will be adversely affected in the course of the next century if the present trend in the rate of emissions continues and the predicted rise in mean temperature and mean sea-level actually take place. The erratic weather pattern already occurring takes its toll on our agriculture yearly. The south-western coast, where a large proportion of our people live, is already subject to severe erosion. The urban fresh water supply intakes already suffer the problem of salinity intrusion during draught periods. Our electricity supply, 90% of which comes from hydro electricity, is threatened during years of lean rainfall.

Madam Chairperson, you will appreciate that Sri Lanka is already facing problems due to adversities of weather. Large sums of money have to be spent for relief measures each year for distribution among people who are affected either by floods or draughts. Poor people get poorer every year when nature is unkind to them. They do not have the resources to overcome these adversities.

The Convention spells out that the Parties should cooperate in preparing for adaptations to the impacts of climate change and take policy measures with a view to minimizing adverse effects on the economy, on public health and on the quality of the environment. All these sound good on paper. Their implementation is the problem.

Though our countries are exposed to adversities of climate change, we contribute least to the phenomena of global warming, the cause for all these problems. Our average per capita emissions is less than 1/10 of that in developed countries. The industrial revolution which began at the turn of this

century enabled the countries of the North to achieve their present state of affluence also triggered the enhanced global warming process. Our countries are embarking into many developmental programmes to uplift the quality of life and alleviate poverty among our people. Such programmes would necessarily cause increased emissions. Rice is the staple food of our people. Growing population demands increased rice production causing increased methane emissions. We are therefore facing a dilemma. The selection of mitigation options will therefore have to be done cautiously. They cannot be done only on scientific and economical basis. They are politically sensitive issues too.

The extent to which Sri Lanka could effectively implement our commitment under the Convention will depend on the extent to which we receive assistance for transfer of technologies, capacity building and implementation of sustainable development programmes. We find that even though the Convention has defined a separate financial mechanism to provide assistance to developing countries, the consensus reached at previous sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committees was to continue with the already established Global Environmental Facility. Madam Chairperson, this Facility, though it provides assistance to address climate change issues, is not solely for that purpose. It covers several other areas. If this interim arrangement is accepted at this Conference, according to the provisions in the Convention we may have to wait up to 4 years to review the situation and take alternative measures. Sri Lanka shares the views expressed by several distinguished delegates of the countries of the South that we should not close the option of establishing a separate funding mechanism for this Convention.

I wish to reiterate our commitment to the Convention and our desire to meet its challenges collectively. There are several issues that have come to this Conference for decisions after failing to reach consensus at the negotiating committee sessions such as Adequacy of Commitments, Joint Implementation, Rules of Procedure etc. It is our wish, Madam Chairperson to see that these issues are resolved in a manner as proposed by the G-77 Group representing the developing countries.

In conclusion let me congratulate you, Madam Chairperson for successfully conducting the deliberation of this Conference. Thank you.