

Climate Change, Adaptation, Mitigation and Sustainable Development:

By: Mr. Purushottam Kunwar, Under Secretary, Ministry of Population and
Environment, Kathmandu, Nepal
(UNFCCC COP-9, Milan, Italy 10-11 December 2003)

Mr. President
Honorable Ministers
Your Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, let me take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to The Government of Italy for the excellent arrangements made for this Ninth session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. I feel most indebted for acknowledging our participation in the Conference.

His Majesty's Government of Nepal attaches great importance to climate change issues. This is evidenced by the fact that Nepal is an active party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Mr. President,

We are greatly concerned about the impacts of climate change and the additional burden it imposes on our country as we attempt to achieve sustainable development. Direct impacts of global warming have been noticed within the last few years in the Northern parts of the country within the Himalayan range. In particular, glaciers are retreating at up to 10 meters per year. On the one hand we are losing these natural reservoirs of fresh water. On the other the floods which will be caused by the rupture of the quickly expanding glacial lakes threaten to cause serious damage to infrastructure, livelihoods, and life downstream. The Himalayas constitute one of the threatened ecosystems in the world. They are

geologically young and fragile and are vulnerable to even small changes in the climatic system.

Annually natural hazards cause the loss of approximately 500 lives in Nepal, and property worth several million rupees. Majority of these losses occur due to hydro-climatic disasters such as torrential rain, floods and soil erosion landslides. In recent years, the frequency of extreme weather events and infrastructure damage caused by floods and landslides have increased steadily. The cost of rehabilitation has escalated and the economy of the country seriously strained.

Long-term adaptation to climate change call for anticipatory actions, which would require considerable investment of capital, labor, and time. Constraints on such resources are clearly very acute in a developing country like Nepal.

Mr. President,

In spite of Nepal's insignificant contribution to climate change, I am happy to mention that we are taking important steps towards mitigation. Recent activities in the promotion of renewable energy for rural areas, clean transportation in urban areas, cleaner production within industries all serve the dual purpose of sustainable development at the local level while at the same time reducing greenhouse gases. Nepal is working towards greater development of its hydropower resources to replace the use of fossil fuels both within the country and within neighboring countries in South Asia. We anticipate active participation in the Clean Development Mechanism in the coming years.

His Majesty's Government of Nepal gives a central role to sustainable development. The National Commission for Sustainable Development has been formed under the chairmanship of Right Hon'ble Prime Minister. The Ministry of Population and Environment, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, acts as the

secretariat to this Commission. Recently, His Majesty's Government of Nepal has finalized the Sustainable Development Agenda for Nepal, wherein the Government is committed to translating the ethos of sustainable development by mainstreaming planning, monitoring and evaluation processes and internalizing sustainable development approaches in all its plans and programs.

Mr. President,

It is clear that the environment in Nepal, which is highly vulnerable to natural hazards and disasters, could face serious impacts due to climate change. This will make the national efforts towards sustainable development even more difficult. We look forward to the implementation of the Special Climate Change Fund and Adaptation Fund to help build our capacity to respond to climate impacts while we attempt to meet our sustainable development goals.

Thank you very much.

Technology, including technology use and development, and transfer of technologies.

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First of all I thank you, Mr. President, for providing this opportunity to Nepal. I would like to use this floor to share some views, on the topic of discussion.

The impact of climate change is most serious in developing countries like Nepal with fragile ecosystems. This is because of the geographical and climatic conditions, high dependence on natural resources and lack of capacity to cope with the changing climate. The satisfaction of current human needs, without depleting the natural resources base for future generations - is perhaps the greatest challenge facing humanity today. This already difficult task is being compounded by the impacts of climate change. We are encouraged that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has strongly emphasized capacity building and transfer of environment friendly technologies to developing countries. Effective and widespread application of these technologies, including both those that are developed in-country and transferred from the outside, will, we believe, be our best defense against the impacts of climate change and also provide our best response to it. I highly appreciate these sincere efforts of UNFCCC.

Mr. President,

Nepal is already using a range of technologies to meet the sustainable energy needs of its rural people. We have one of the most active household biogas programmes in the world. Rural electrification is being carried out using solar home systems and

community owned micro-hydro projects in addition to expansion of the national grid. In the cities Nepal is a major user of solar water heaters and electric vehicles. All these mitigation technologies need scaling up to reach the majority population which does not have access to basic modern services.

Nepal also needs new technologies which can compete with conventional GHG intensive practices and technologies. This is needed in the fields of agriculture, household energy, transportation, and industry. Nepal's infrastructure is at an early stage of development and as a result the country can adopt modalities of development and technologies which will allow it to leapfrog the more conventional and dirtier infrastructure base of more industrialized countries. There is no reason why Nepal should not adopt efficient and modern technologies immediately.

In order to adapt to the increased frequency of extreme weather events, Nepal needs access to satellite based early warning systems. Information about Glacial Lake Outburst Floods, for example, need to be conveyed to people living downstream in order to avoid loss to life. To adapt to changes in weather patterns our farmers need early warning so they can change their cropping patterns.

Mr. President,

If the family of nations is to make a transition to clean energy technologies within the 21st century, countries like Nepal which have no fossil fuel reserves of its own and which are early in their development process can make this transition earlier. For this we need to have access to modern technologies like hybrid electric vehicles, electric trains, the latest hydropower technologies, fuel cells, solar PV and wind technologies, all at an affordable rate. Nepal needs access to satellite-based technologies to help us forecast changes to weather patterns so we can inform our farmers. We also need early warning systems so people can be informed

before hand about catastrophic events. We anticipate the UNFCCC to play a central role in facilitating our access to these technologies.

Thank you.