

**Statement by
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Minister of Environment & Forests, India
&
President, COP-8**

**at the
First Plenary Meeting
Eighth Session of the
Conference of the Parties
to the
U.N. Framework Convention on
Climate Change**

**New Delhi,
23 October, 2002**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to welcome you to the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Please accept my warmest felicitations and greetings. On behalf of the Government and the people of India I wish all our guests from abroad a very comfortable and fulfilling stay in India.

We have just lit the traditional lamp. This is auspicious and represents enhancement of understanding. Light symbolizes knowledge and the removal of ignorance. The wick in the lamp signifies the ego. When lit by knowledge, the wick which is the ego, gradually disappears. The flame burns upwards and higher. I am sure that the Conference will take us to higher ideals.

Friends: You have elected me as the President of the Conference of the Parties. I thank you for this honour. It is an acknowledgment of India's commitment to addressing climate change and promoting sustainable development.

I am proud to say that the impetus for India's environmental protection has emanated from the unhesitating support of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. It should be appreciated that this is a vast and varied country with many agro-climatic zones, diverse flora and fauna, and a large population. The Prime Minister has been instrumental for major community based initiatives which have catalysed sustainable development.

The conference will identify solutions, generate awareness and enhance actions at all levels to respond to a very significant global problem. I am conscious of the challenge confronting us, its dimensions, and the urgency. At the same time, I feel pride and confident in the reflection that this multilateral forum in the United Nations system has propelled and steered the world community in such a positive manner. Many have contributed to the process, in government, civil society, business, the media and various levels of public and private leadership.

The leadership of H.E. Mr. Mohamed Elyazghi as President of the seventh Conference gave us the Marrakesh accords. We are very fortunate to have the benefit of his experience and wisdom during the Conference. Earlier, the collective statesmanship of the resumed sixth Conference of the Parties, which resulted in the Bonn political agreements, was piloted so ably by the Hon'ble Mr. Jan Pronk.

The fusion and unison accomplished at Bonn and Marrakesh has brought within reach the Kyoto Protocol.. We must bring into force the Protocol without delay.

Rise in temperature is already beginning to affect physical and biological systems. Frequent floods and droughts are having serious impacts. Depleted moisture combined with heat stress is projected to reduce the global yield of major foodgrains. The increased

risk of the negative impacts of climate change in developing countries will worsen poverty. Hunger is estimated to increase, with low income groups less able to afford sufficient food.

What should be the focus at the New Delhi Conference? The institutional issues, in large measure, are now quite settled. The eighth Conference of the Parties could be a milestone for implementation and promotion of sustainable development to address climate change. Higher priority should be given to adaptation, a pathway to sustainable development, keeping in view that those with the least resources have the least capacity to adapt and are the most vulnerable.

The WSSD Plan of Implementation has lighted our path. The linkages between climate change and sustainable development recognize the problems of poverty, land degradation, access to water and food, and human health. Poverty eradication is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. Energy has a central role in alleviating poverty. Action is required for the dissemination of innovative technologies in respect of the key sectors of development, particularly energy.

This conference, including the Subsidiary Bodies, has a spectrum of work, with the high-level segment providing political direction. The high-level roundtables will take stock of implementation and promotion of sustainable development to address climate change. The message should be beamed expressively, far and wide, to build oneness with the stakeholders.

A Delhi Declaration would cover climate change and sustainable development. This will be an important outcome. The Conference Bureau has put me on call for preparing a draft in consultation with Parties. This must be a consensus product. It should articulate the priority needs and requirements in accordance with the Convention and the Marrakesh accords. For this, I need your help to access all views. I seek the guidance of all Parties.

I will be available to you at all times, without coming in the way of your experiencing the sights in our capital city. Many friends have indicated to me how impressed they are by the manner in which the city's air has been cleaned up in recent years. You will notice that the public transport in New Delhi has switched over to compressed natural gas. This reflects India's technology vision on sustainable development, which, indeed, covers a wide range including agriculture, water conservation, forestry, renewables and other sectors.

These initiatives reflect what is occurring in many other countries. All Parties have to promote sustainable development. But, developed countries are required also to demonstrate their lead role in modifying longer-term emission trends, and in this respect they are committed specifically to adopt mitigation policies and measures. Even as we address this at the Conference, let us press for the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, the key for which is with the developed countries.

I would like this Conference to be remembered as a meet, which connected well with the most vulnerable stakeholders – the marginal farmer, the fisherman, the small livestock owner and others, including the indigenous communities. We must focus on those which have contributed the least to the problem, but are the most vulnerable. I have often thought whether we have kept ourselves alive to the ethical and moral dimensions of the global problem. And, is there any shade of a metropolitan mind-set or approach, which is coming in the way of our putting the last first.

I am conscious of the momentousness of a Conference of the Parties under the Climate Convention. The wisdom and experience of this truly impressive assembly augurs well for our work ahead. I have already experienced the lighthouse qualities of the COP Bureau. I am aware of the keen scientific temper of Mr. Halldor Thorgeirsson, Chairman of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice and the entrepreneurship, perceptiveness and clarity of Ambassador Raul Estrada Oyuela, Chairman of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation.

Let us manage our time well in the interest of efficient negotiations. The facilitation in the run-up to the conference available from Ms. Joke Waller-Hunter, Executive Secretary and her team has been of the highest quality. We are well assured of the best support of the secretariat, as we proceed.

Ladies and Gentlemen: The hopes, aspirations and faith of many are centered on the New Delhi Conference of the Parties. Let me recall the words of wisdom of the Tamil sage Thiruvalluvar, who lived two thousand years ago: "*Gnalam Karudhinum Kaikoodum Kaalam, Karudhi Idathal Seyin*". This means, "the world will be in your hands if you act at the right time and at the right place."

We begin the conference today. Let us work towards success.

Thank you very much.