

**SAARC/South Asia Event - Climate Vulnerability
and its Impacts on the MDGs**

Statement by

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Assalam Alaikum and Good Morning.

Climate Change is a reality. We, in South Asia, know it through experience. The onslaught of natural disasters has increased in frequency and ferocity in our region. Moreover, the abnormal, rapid melting of the Himalayan glaciers and the rise of sea level portends (catastrophic) consequences. If these continue worldwide because of chaotic, climatic conditions, human civilization will perish. World leaders are aware of it, but unable to take bold actions for possible myopic domestic compulsions. We have seen this at Copenhagen in December last, where the Accord fell short of global expectations.

Mr. Chairman,

It is now too late to play the blame game. It is, however, not late for the global community to make the required sacrifices. In the end, without sacrifices all would suffer the woes of self inflicted tragedy. Unfortunately, some of our countries in South Asia, due to our topography, whether landlocked on the snowy Himalayan range, or vulnerable islands in the moody Indian Ocean, or in between as deltaic landmass hugging the sea, they all are already seriously challenged by the adverse impacts of climate change.

Our region is also densely populated with nearly 1.5 billion people, a significant portion of whom are below poverty level. Most pursue livelihoods depending on farming, livestock and fishing which are always hit hardest by natural disasters. Scientific findings indicate that the disappearance of snow in the Himalayas would dramatically change the climate of South Asia, and upset the ecological balance of the region.

The onrush of water from the melting mountains would flood the downstream countries of Bhutan, Nepal, deltaic India and Bangladesh. The offloading of the water in the Indian Ocean and consequent sea rise of a meter would submerge, amongst others, the beautiful islands of the Maldives, and a quarter of Bangladesh.

Our country will face the displacement of an estimated 30 million people who would be moving north in a region with the highest density of population in the world, leading to formidable social and even cross border problems.

The cyclone Sidr of 2007 is an example of a humanitarian crisis, and mass movement of displaced people. About 8.5 million people were affected, 5 lakh 64 thousand homes destroyed, 98 percent crops of 8 lakh 10 thousand hectares of land damaged. The annual budget consequently went haywire with allocations meant for MDGs redirected for the survival needs of the affected people.

Most of the countries like ours are resource strapped and possess frail institutional capacities to meet such crises.

Therefore, the demand should be focused on the urgent establishment of an 'International Climate Change Fund' and make it immediately operational as agreed to by the world community at COP 15 in Copenhagen last December. This is the least, the major emitters of Green House Gases responsible for global warming and climate change and for creating a turbulent world of natural disasters, could do. They must also quickly agree on a legally binding agreement with respect to emission cuts for stabilizing the earthly elements soon.

Clearly, the contributions of the rich, developed world to the "Fund" would need to be generous. In all fairness and justice, the "Fund" should be distributed based on per capita, and the climate vulnerability index. They must also be separate from their commitment of 0.7 percent of the GNI for the developing countries, and 0.2 percent of the GNI, for the LDCs, which was reaffirmed in the Brussels Program of Action. They must also agree to free transfer of green technology to the developing world.

Unless these measures are taken, it would be difficult to achieve the MDGs by 2015. These constitute the minimum support that the countries involved could give as redemption for their blind, reckless drive for development which now threatens the existence of countries like ours.

Resources and technology are imperative for the adaptation and mitigation programs needed. Bangladesh has already adopted a 134-point climate change action plan, most of which face delay in implementation due to paucity of funds, and unavailability of modern green technology.

Success of all our adaptation and mitigation plans can only keep our dense population within our boundaries, and from overflowing across international borders leading to the creation of undesirable crises. Nevertheless, in anticipation of displaced climate change refugees and migrants, which are inevitable in variable scales, I believe countries of our South Asia should take the initiative as a group to mobilize world support for a legal regime under the UNFCCC Protocol ensuring social, cultural, and economic rehabilitation of climate change induced displaced persons.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I thank all SAARC countries for cosponsoring this important event. I would also like to thank the United Kingdom, Mexico, Norway and Ethiopia for being with us here today. My thanks also go to all the panelists for their valuable contributions, and of course to the UNDP for partnering and supporting the event.

I thank you all.

Khoda Hafez
Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabadhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.
