

**Commemoration of the 2nd International Day of Clean Air for blue skies**  
**Healthy Air, Healthy Planet -**  
7 September 2021

Regional cooperation and action

**Keynote Remarks: Ambassador of India, H.E. Ms. Suchitra  
Durai, Chair of 6<sup>th</sup> Committee on Environment and  
Development**

Executive Secretary of UNESCAP Ibu Armida,

Deputy Executive Secretary Mr Kaveh Zahedi,

H.E Mr Lee Wook-heon, Ambassador of RoK to Thailand

Excellencies, distinguished Delegates,

1. I am honoured to be speaking at this second International Day of Clean Air for blue skies. The theme for this year, “Healthy Air, Healthy Planet”, is particularly relevant during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and it rightly emphasises the health effects of air pollution.

2. As previous speakers have mentioned, air pollution kills an estimated 7 million people every year and thus it is the biggest environmental health risk of our times. Airborne pollutants are responsible for chronic coronary disease and lung ailments including cancer. The nature of air pollution is such that it could involve many trans-boundary issues. Thus, regional cooperation becomes important. There has been strong and growing support for such cooperation through the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, and ESCAP Resolution 75/4 on Strengthening regional cooperation to tackle air pollution.

3. Management of air pollution in developing countries as well as in countries with economies in transition is impacted by several factors including lack of expertise, technology and adequate-related information. Technological and expertise limitations are considered as major hindrances in achieving our obligations under various international conventions and in meeting national commitments on prevention, control and abatement of pollution; as well as protection of environment. Therefore, technology transfer and information sharing are important aspects of any regional collaboration on environment. Technology transfer does not just relate to ‘hardware’, but also to total systems and their component parts, including know-how, goods and services, and organizational and managerial procedures. Accordingly, multilateral and bilateral cooperation on air pollution should focus on demonstration/pilot projects, such as prototype development for the best-available technologies and best environmental practices for pollution prevention, minimization, and

mitigation strategies for the control and abatement of pollution, specifically air pollution.

4. The Technical Expert Group on Environment and Development as decided by the 6<sup>th</sup> Committee on Environment and Development is a step in that direction. This mechanism will help Member Countries to exchange information with each other as well as facilitate technical discussions among experts from ministries or other public institutions and UNESCAP on environment and development matters, including on air pollution. It could also provide technical feedback and guidance on how best to leverage to strengthen regional cooperation and develop appropriate modalities to address these challenges.

5. India is committed to create a clean environment and pollution free air and water. Sustainable development, in terms of enhancement of human well-being, is an integral part of India's development philosophy and enshrined in the Indian Constitution. In 2015, PM Modi launched our first national air quality index which tracked 8 air pollutants.

6. In 2019, India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change launched the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) as a long-term, time-bound, national level strategy to tackle the air pollution problem across the country. The targets are to achieve 20% to 30% reduction in Particulate Matter (PM10 and PM2.5) concentrations by 2024 keeping 2017 as the base year for the comparison of concentration. Under the NCAP, 102 Indian cities have been identified to meeting annual average ambient air quality standards. As part of the programme, funds have been allocated for installation and commissioning of continuous ambient air quality monitoring systems, creating green buffer zones along the roads, mechanical street sweepers, mobile enforcement units, water sprinklers, public awareness and capacity building activities.

7. For clean air, we must take comprehensive measures not only in terms of the fuels that we use but also how we cook, heat our homes, even the food that we eat, the manner in which we grow our crops, and also how we move people and goods from one place to another. One of the most positive stories to be highlighted by UNEP in the first UN Clean Air Day was that of Indian Railways. The Indian railways is one of the largest and most complex transportation networks in the world. It carries 8 billion passengers annually. So, last year the Government of India committed itself that the Indian Railways will become a zero carbon emitter by 2030. A massive electrification process is now underway. It is estimated that this will lead to elimination of 7.5 million tonnes of Co2 every year.

8. A larger issue, is of course, climate change. This is one of the major challenges that we face today. Prime Minister Modi stated at the Climate Adaptation Summit on 25 January 2021 that India will not just arrest environmental degradation but reverse it; and not just create new capacities but make them an agent for global good.

9. India's Nationally Determined Contributions (or NDCs) include sustainable lifestyles. With these NDCs, we are not only meeting our Paris Agreement targets but exceeding them. India, at present, is the only country on track among the G20 nations to meet climate change mitigation commitments. For India, climate action is all encompassing. It is not only about mitigation but it also emphasizes in equal measure – the importance of climate adaptation, loss & damage and means of implementation—finance, technology and capacity building support from developed to developing countries.

10. The road to fighting climate change is through climate justice. It also means giving the developing countries enough space to grow. India hopes that ambitious climate actions domestically by developed world will free up carbon space for developing countries. There is need is to cut absolute emissions rapidly, and within this decade in view of the fact that the remaining global carbon budget is meagre and it will be exhausted within this decade at current rate of global emissions.

11. The latest IPCC report reaffirms India's position that historical cumulative emissions are the source of the current climate crisis. India's cumulative and per capita emissions are significantly low and far less than the fair share of global carbon budget.

12. To conclude, I would like to emphasize that regional cooperation and joint action in discussing and sharing emerging science and knowledge to address the challenges of air pollution is important. In 2020, as the world was in a lock down mode, and the mood sombre, as factories shut and transportation systems ground to a halt, the air quality itself improved dramatically in many polluted cities of the world and, finally, the denizens were able to see blue skies. So this shows that air pollution is indeed reversible. Coordinated efforts involving governments, private sector, and civil society institutions to build and promote clean air solutions can further aid in building back better and post-COVID-19 recovery.

Last but not the least I would like to congratulate the Ambassador of Republic of Korea for their advocacy of this important cause and for also having brought out a useful handbook on the issue. I also thank the other countries for co-hosting this event.

**Thank you**

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