

Vote of Thanks by President Mohamed Nasheed at the Conclusion of the Sixteenth SAARC Summit

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we come to the end of our Sixteenth Summit Meeting, I feel privileged to express, on behalf of all heads of delegation taking part in this Summit, our warm congratulations to you, Mr. Chairman, for the excellent manner in which you have guided the proceedings of this Summit. I have every confidence in the Government of Bhutan to successfully carry out the SAARC Agenda during its Chairmanship.

I would also like to express our very sincere gratitude to President Mahinda Rajapakse for his wisdom and guidance in executing the Chairmanship of SAARC over the last twenty months.

Mr. Chairman,

As I mentioned in my opening address, this is my first SAARC Summit and it has been a great honour and privilege to be here amongst respected statesmen and women, amongst democrats, amongst visionary leaders, and amongst the South Asian Family. I will take three overriding impressions away with me from the Summit:

Firstly, the strong sense of togetherness and solidarity between our countries, peoples and governments; and a sense that we share a common destiny, a destiny that will see South Asia become one of the most important and dynamic regions of the world as the Century unfolds;

Secondly, the determination of the leaders here-present to work together and cooperate in a large and increasingly diverse range of fields; to pool resources and expertise in areas where common action is necessary or beneficial. This determination has been clearly in evidence during this Summit where we have signed new SAARC agreements on trade in services and environmental cooperation; and have agreed the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change.

Last but not the least, a recognition that South Asia is faced by a daunting range of challenges, some intra-regional some global in nature; but that, if we stand together, shoulder-to-shoulder, we can turn those challenges into opportunities, driving progress and prosperity. Hence, as I mentioned yesterday, I am heartened by the optimism demonstrated by India and Pakistan to compartmentalize their differences and give SAARC a new push for the benefit of the people of the region.

Mr. Chairman,

The one common theme that transcends and summarizes these three conclusions, I believe, is the importance of SAARC, both as both a community and as an organization.

I have no doubt that with our sense of common identity, common history and common destiny; with the enormous economic, technological and human potential; with the vision and determination of our leaders to work together towards common goals; and with the positive outlook that has clearly been evident these past two days; we have all the ingredients we need to improve the lives of our people, to face-down hunger, intolerance, violence, poverty and strife, to build better and fairer societies, to consolidate and strengthen our democracies, to

expand our economies while protecting our natural environment, and to play an increasingly assertive role in important global decisions that affect us.

What we need to do now is to bring those ingredients together more efficiently and effectively, to combine them and let them grow. For that to happen it is vital that SAARC, as an organization, also evolves in order to keep pace with the reality and the ambition of our region. My fear is that, at the moment, there is a disconnect between ambition and achievement, between rhetoric and implementation. The ultimate result of this disconnect is that SAARC is not adequately delivering on the needs of the people of South Asia or on the promises it has made to its people.

Now is therefore the time, as we celebrate SAARC's 25th anniversary, to take stock, and to begin a meaningful and self-critical process of appraisal; so that we can help SAARC focus on those issues and areas where, through common action, it can make a real difference, and so that we can equip SAARC with the tool and mechanisms it needs to complete the tasks we set.

Mr. Chairman,

Before concluding, I would like to offer some words of thanks.

I would like to congratulate our foreign ministers, foreign secretaries, and other senior officials who have so expertly set the stage for this important summit. Let me also express our appreciation to the SAARC Secretary-General and his able team for their dedicated work and for the excellent documentation they have prepared.

We are also pleased that SAARC Observer Delegations from important partner countries have been able to attend the Summit. We thank them for their commitment to our region, and look forward to welcoming them again next year.

And last but not least, I would like to express our deep collective gratitude to His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of Bhutan, His Majesty's Government, and the kind and generous people of Bhutan for the exceptionally warm welcome they have afforded us and for the dedicated, thorough and professional manner in which they have organized the Summit and made our stay in the beautiful Kingdom of Bhutan so enjoyable.

Indeed, they have set the bar very high for the Maldives as we begin preparations for the 17th SAARC Summit in Male next year. I would like to thank all Heads of State and Government for accepting the offer of the Maldives to host that important meeting.

I thank you all and look forward to welcoming you in the Maldives.

Thank you.