INAUGURAL SESSION

(04 NOVEMBER 2019)

SOUTH ASIA FORUM ON PREPAREDNESS FOR REGIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE KATHMANDU, 4-6 NOVEMBER 2019

ADDRESS BY H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSIAN B. SIAL, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

Chief Guest, Distinguished Chief Executive Officer of National Reconstruction Authority of Nepal,

Excellencies,

Delegates from the Member States of SAARC,

Representatives from IFRC, UNOCHA, and ADPC,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honour and a privilege for me to address the Inaugural Session of this important Forum.

We wish to thank the distinguished Chief Guest for gracing this Inaugural Session with his august presence.

We thank IFRC for organizing this Forum. We look forward to working closely with IFRC in furthering collaboration in disaster response and risk mitigation.

We extend a very warm welcome to the distinguished delegates to Kathmandu and to this Forum.

We highly appreciate participation of distinguished representatives of IFRC, UNOCHA and ADPC in this Forum.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, as other regions in the world, South Asia too is prone to natural disasters. Fully cognizant of this, SAARC accords high priority to strengthening regional cooperation for preservation, protection and management of the region’s diverse and fragile eco-systems.

At the political level, successive SAARC Summits and meetings of the SAARC Environment Ministers have provided valuable guidance for intensifying regional cooperation in the areas of environment, climate change and natural disasters.

At the inter-governmental level, the foremost initiative taken by SAARC is the preparation of the Regional Study on the Causes and Consequences of Natural Disasters and the Protection and Preservation of the Environment in 1991, followed by the institution of the Committee on Environment in 1992, which was subsequently renamed as the Technical Committee on Environment and Forestry. An Inter-Governmental Expert Group on Climate Change has also been established. Other important regional instruments include the SAARC Environment Action Plan (1997); Malé Declaration (2005); Comprehensive Framework on Disaster Management (2006-2015); Dhaka Declaration on Climate Change and SAARC Action Plan on Climate Change (2008), and SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment (2010).

Most importantly, at the Seventeenth SAARC Summit held in Malé in November 2011, our leaders adopted the SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters, which provides an effective regional mechanism to achieve substantial reduction in the loss of human life and damage to social, economic and environmental assets in the region. The Agreement also calls upon the Member States to jointly respond to disasters by sharing and deploying resources to mitigate their impacts.

Besides the regional mechanisms and instruments, an Interim Unit of the SAARC Disaster Management Centre, which is operational in Gujarat, India, has been doing a commendable job in imparting knowledge and skills in disaster response and risk mitigation through workshops and seminars.

As a result of these endeavours at the regional level, in the recent years the countries of South Asia have been able to develop strategies to reduce damages from natural disasters. Moreover, there has been a paradigm shift in the approach to disaster management, from one of post disaster relief and rehabilitation to that of early warning, preparedness and risk mitigation.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to state that we live in an interdependent environment. We have to work in unison to preserve our planet to ensure better future for ourselves and our future generations.

We wish to once again thank the distinguished Chief Guest for making it convenient for himself to be with us for this Inaugural Session this evening.

We wish the delegates a pleasant stay in Kathmandu and this Forum a fruitful outcome.

I thank you.

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