

Hon'ble Prof. Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhary, Federal Minister of Planning Development & Special Initiatives of Pakistan;

Honorable Ministers:

Her Excellency Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of ESCAP;

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates;

It is an honour to address the Inaugural Session of the Sixth South and South-West Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals.

I convey sincere appreciation to the esteemed Government of Pakistan, UNESCAP and the Sustainable Development Policy Institute for jointly hosting this event.

I express deep sorrow over the loss of lives of people in Pakistan due to the floods. Natural disasters and the pandemic have not only changed the lives and livelihoods of our peoples, but have also impacted the development of countries in the region.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The South and South-West Asia subregion continues to lag in achieving the 17 SDGs this year. Though, progress has been made on some goals, the pace is slow. The goals with progress are life on land (Goal 15), no poverty (Goal 1), and good health and well-being (Goal 3). The subregion is regressing on goals for climate action (Goal 13), sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11) and responsible consumption and production (Goal 12). These outcomes, coupled with the unprecedented COVID-19 effects, call for urgent strategic and concentrated efforts to accelerate the progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Excellencies,

South and South-West Asia records the highest multi -dimensional poverty ratio among all other regions. South and South-West Asia performed well in providing electricity to people, which accelerated progress on affordable and clean energy (Goal 7). However, more needs to be done to increase access to and affordability of renewable energy. Many countries in the subregion have managed to reduce maternal, neonatal and child mortality, which have contributed to relatively good progress on good health and well-being (Goal 3).

Insufficient progress has been registered on zero hunger (Goal 2) . Prevalence of malnutrition and stunting among children under five has reduced. However, more people are suffering from moderate or severe food insecurity. The subregion made moderate progress on industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9), mainly due to the rapid expansion of mobile network coverage and volume of trade. However, this has come with the cost of more CO2 emission from the manufacturing sector and the shrinking share of production by medium and high-tech industries.

Excellencies,

South and South-West Asia has regressed in three goals, namely, sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and climate action

(Goal 13). The main areas that need urgent action to reverse negative trends are air pollution in cities, human and economic loss from disasters, fossil fuel subsidies and greenhouse gas emissions, without which the subregion will not be able to achieve the 2030 targets.

When we all thought that the countries in South Asia are back on track of economic recovery, in a recent observation, the International Monetary Fund has predicted a 4 Trillion Dollar loss in global output from now to 2026. IMF stated that the world is seeing a “fundamental shift” in the global economy from relative predictability to greater uncertainty. It has been predicted that the world’s largest economies are slowing down, which will have an adverse effect on developing countries that are seeing reduced demand for exports, which may be further strained by high food and energy prices.

Distinguished Delegates,

It is clear that we have to increase our investments in key areas of health, education, social protection and basic infrastructure. We need to promote sustainable industrialization, while addressing the requirements of the development of rural agrarian sectors. We must move towards greater reliance on clean energy, while placing environmental sustainability at the core of all development strategies and initiatives.

The time also calls for South Asian countries to come together and strengthen their partnerships for development. There are many areas where the countries in the sub-region can come together and support each other for mutual development gains, starting with trade and market integration. Enhanced regional connectivity, in terms of transport, digital and people-to-people connectivity, will substantially improve our chances of achieving the 2030 Agenda. We are confident that the South Asia Network on SDGs, together with UNESCAP, will act as a bridge in filling the gaps in promoting regional cooperation and sharing of best practices on SDG-achievement in this region.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm SAARC’s commitment and resolve to assist the Member States in achieving SDGs and building back better through more effective regional cooperation and collaboration.

I wish the Forum every success in its deliberations.

Thank you!
