

Speech by the Secretary General of SAARC H.E. Mr. Md. Golam Sarwar at the Sagarmatha Sambaad, Plenary Session on the theme "Climate Change, Mountains, and the Future of Humanity"

16 May 2025, Kathmandu

**Your Excellency the Right Honourable Prime Minister of Nepal
The Honourable Foreign Minister of Nepal
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Namaste and warm greetings from the Secretariat of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

It is a great honor for me to join you at this important forum, *Sagarmatha Sambaad*, aptly named after the world's highest peak - the majestic Mount Everest, Sagarmatha, which is not just our shared heritage, but also a symbol of endurance and resilience of our natural world. I commend the Government of Nepal for convening this timely multi-stakeholder dialogue on the critical theme of **"climate change, mountains, and the future of humanity"**.

Excellencies,

The ecological lifeline today stands at a crossroads. Nowhere is the impact of climate change more visible and more urgent than in our mountains. Therefore, our mountains are sounding an unmistakable call for urgent and unified action.

Climate change has turned the Himalayas into both a frontline and a fault line. The Himalayas, which span across multiple SAARC member states, are warming twice the global average. Glaciers are retreating at an alarming rate. Seasonal patterns are becoming unpredictable. Communities are facing increasing risks of floods, landslides, glacial lake outburst floods, water insecurity, rising food insecurity and forced migration. For mountain dwellers and downstream populations alike, these changes are not abstract projections - they are urgent realities.

In South Asia, home to nearly a quarter of humanity, the stakes could not be higher. This is not just an environmental crisis. It is a development crisis, a security concern, and a human tragedy in the making.

As we confront this growing crisis, I firmly believe that the road to sustainability must be built both on regional cooperation and global solidarity. The shared nature of our geography - and the interconnectedness of our climate - demands shared responsibility at every level.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2010, the leaders from SAARC member states adopted the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change at the 16th SAARC Summit. It was a landmark moment - the first time climate change took center stage at the highest level of our regional cooperation.

The Thimphu Statement recognized that our mountains, rivers, and people face a shared threat, and it committed us to a shared response. It emphasized:

The urgency of regional and international collaboration on climate change mitigation and adaptation, and promote climate resilience;

The importance of low-carbon technologies, renewable energy as well as knowledge sharing;

And the moral responsibility to act not only for ourselves but for future generations.

That spirit must guide us today and forward.

As the regional body committed to advancing peace, prosperity and partnership, SAARC has recognized the need for a coordinated regional response to climate change. Our regional instruments have played a vital role in fostering partnership to enhance climate resilience, promote sustainable energy solutions, and support adaptation and mitigation efforts across member states.

Excellencies,

Let this Sagarmatha Sambaad serve not only as a platform for dialogue – but as a call for action - as we move forward on the path of climate resilience, regional solidarity, and sustainable development for all our people.

As the Secretary General of SAARC, I call upon all member states and our partners around the world to prioritize:

First, **strengthen regional and global cooperation on climate science**, especially through data sharing on glaciers, water flows, and weather patterns; as well as by promoting exchange of knowledge and technology transfer on clean and renewable energy;

Second, **invest in resilient communities**, ensuring they have access to early warning systems, sustainable livelihoods, and clean energy; Vulnerable populations must receive the focused attention and resources they urgently need;

Third, **protect and conserve the ecosystems that protect us**, by preserving biodiversity that regulate our climate and sustain life;

Fourth, **amplify our collective voice on climate advocacy**, at every forum, demand fair and equitable climate finance that upholds the principles of climate justice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mountains may divide us geographically, but they unite us in common purpose. Their waters do not stop at borders. Neither do landslides, floods, or shifting monsoons. The climate crisis is indifferent to lines on the map. Therefore, our response must be unified, science-driven and rooted in justice, and through regional cooperation and integration

We must reimagine development through the lens of sustainability. We must ensure that global collaboration is no longer optional, but imperative.

Let us harness the strength of our governments, civil society, academia and youth to forge solutions that are science-based, equity-driven and inclusive.

I thank the Government of Nepal for this platform. I also take this opportunity to commend the Government of Nepal for its strong and committed advocacy for the mountains and for a sustainable future for all. SAARC stands ready to work with all partners – local, regional and global – to safeguard the future of our mountains, and in doing so, the future of humanity itself. And I join Nepal in its strong call for action on climate change.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our future is intertwined with the fate of our mountains. The time to act—cohesively, courageously, and collectively—is now.

Let the summit of Sagarmatha remind us of the heights we can achieve when we come together.

I wish everyone here a productive and successful sambaad.

Thank you.