

INAUGURAL SESSION
(11 AUGUST 2018)

ASIAN YOUTH ASSEMBLY 2018
“REVITALIZING ASIAN YOUTH INTEGRATION FOR CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE ERA OF SDGs”
KATHMANDU, 11 AUGUST 2018

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

Rt. Hon’ble Speaker of the Parliament and the Chief Guest,
Excellencies,
Young Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honour and a privilege for me to address the Inaugural Session of the Asian Youth Assembly 2018.

I wish to thank the Global Youth Parliament and the Youth Parliament of Nepal for co-organizing this historic event and for inviting me to address its Inaugural Session. I am truly impressed by the excellent arrangements made by the organizers for this occasion.

I wish to congratulate the organizers for choosing a very apt theme for this Assembly, namely, *“Revitalizing Asian Youth Integration for Climate Change in the era of SDGs.”*

The relevance of the theme of this meeting stems from the fact that the challenges of Climate Change and Sustainable Development are interlinked that must be addressed concomitantly to deliver a stable and secure world to our future generations. There is, therefore, urgent need to effectively address the Climate Change issues to accelerate progress towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I wish to welcome the youth from the Asian region to this Assembly being held in this beautiful and historical city of Kathmandu and the seat of the Headquarters of SAARC. The participation of a large number of youth in this important event demonstrates their resolve to play an active role in creating awareness about and averting the adverse impacts of Climate Change, which is now both a global phenomenon and threat.

Rt. Hon’ble Speaker,
Distinguished Participants,

Youth constitute a growing proportion of the world’s population, with a majority of them living in Asia. The South Asian region as well is experiencing increase in the proportion of youth in the total population. This creates a potential window of opportunity for the youth to shape the destiny of our region for the betterment of our future generations.

SAARC has always accorded priority to the overall development of the youth in the region. The regional commitment to the advancement of youth is amply manifest in the Declarations of several SAARC Summits.

In this context, the resolve expressed by our leaders during the Tenth SAARC Summit held in Colombo in 1998 culminated in the adoption of the SAARC Social Charter in 2004, with a broad range of targets to be achieved across the region for youth mobilization, among others.

The Charter calls upon the Member States, *inter alia*, to create productive employment opportunities for the youth; provide enhanced job opportunities for young people through increased investment in education and vocational training; provide adequate employment opportunities and leisure time activities for youth to make them economically and socially productive; and create awareness about family planning, HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases, and risks of consumption of tobacco, alcohol and drugs.

Further, recognizing the need to harness the idealism of youth for regional cooperative programmes, the Charter stresses on the imperative of the resurgence of South Asian consciousness in the youth of each country through participation in the development programmes and through greater understanding and appreciation of each other's country. Moreover, the Charter recognizes the need to promote increased cross-fertilization of ideas through greater interaction among students, scholars and academics across the region.

Most importantly, in pursuance of the directive of the Sixteenth SAARC Summit held in Thimphu, a SAARC Youth Charter is under active consideration of the Member States. Upon its adoption, the Charter will provide a regional framework for complementary efforts among the Member States to promote, to the fullest extent possible, the health, well-being, potential and rights of the youth, in partnership with them, with focus on five key areas of action, namely, Enabling Environment, Gender Equality, Education and Skills Development, Employment and Health.

Another significant initiative spearheaded by SAARC is the institution of the SAARC Youth Award Scheme in 1996, which is aimed at recognizing extraordinary young talents and encouraging overall development of the youth in the region. I am happy to state that among the eleven recipients of the SAARC Youth Award so far, three have been awarded for their outstanding work in the areas of Environment, Natural Disasters and Climate Change. This amply suggests the growing involvement of our youth in these crucial areas.

Rt. Hon'ble Speaker,
Distinguished Participants,

As you are aware, Climate Change has emerged as a global threat, posing a serious risk to the fundamental rights to life, health, food and an adequate standard of living of individuals and communities across the world, including the South Asian region. Frequent earthquakes, cyclones, floods, droughts, tsunamis, landslides, and heat and cold waves have been impinging lives, property, and livelihoods across the region. Global warming and rising sea levels are other existential threats to the humanity.

It is, therefore, abundantly clear that the impacts of Climate Change and environmental degradation have been intense, varied and frequent, leading to displacement of human population, and deprivation of food, water and shelter, striking at the very core universal principle of human rights – the right to life and the right to live.

SAARC, therefore, attaches high priority to preserving and protecting the environment and making South Asia resilient to Climate Change and disaster risks. The SAARC Environmental Action Plan (1997), Dhaka Declaration and SAARC Action Plan on Climate Change (2008), Comprehensive Framework on Disaster Management (2006-2015), Thimphu Statement on Climate Change (2010), SAARC Convention on Environment (2011) and SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters (2011) are some of the most significant initiatives taken to strengthen regional cooperation in the areas of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Disasters.

Rt. Hon'ble Speaker,
Distinguished Participants,

We live in an interdependent environment. We have to work in unison to preserve our planet to ensure better future for ourselves, our children, and our future generations. Otherwise, environmental degradation and Climate Change will continue to cause a cycle of serious consequences for all of us.

Youth can play an active role in combating the adverse effects of Climate Change. While it is heartening to see the emergence of an increasing number of Youth organizations working in the area of Climate Change, I strongly feel that creating awareness among the youth is the key to tackling Climate Change within the overall framework of the SDGs.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to call upon the youth of today, who are our future, to act as an “Agent of Change” in creating a safer and better world to live in. I say this not only because you are the ones who are to inhabit the Earth tomorrow. I say this also because you inherit the responsibility to protect your own habitat.

I wish this Assembly a resounding success!

I thank you.
