

GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

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STATEMENT
BY
HIS EXCELLENCY
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MR PRESIDENT

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to address this plenary session of the Global Conference on Sustainable Transport this morning.

I would like to thank the Government of Turkmenistan and the UN for organizing this first-ever Global Conference on Sustainable Transport in Ashgabat. I would also like to place on record our sincere appreciation and thank the esteemed Government of Turkmenistan for extending gracious hospitality to me and my delegation since our arrival in this beautiful city of Ashgabat.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

We are very much aware that South Asia is the least integrated region of the world and at the same time we are also mindful of the fact that connectivity is the key to overall development of the South Asia .We are also aware that alleviating poverty from South Asia, as the President of Afghanistan yesterday in his speech pointed out, will remain a distant dream if our region is not connected.

Like any other regional and international organization across the globe, SAARC too attaches high priority to strengthen intra-regional transport connectivity. This commitment has been amply articulated by the successive SAARC Summits, including the last two Summits held in the Maldives in 2011 and in Nepal in 2014. Accordingly, in addition to measures taken to bolster regional economic and financial integration, efforts are underway to promote physical or transport connectivity across the region.

In the South Asian context, where bulk of trade between the SAARC countries is through land border stations, the need for stronger intra-regional physical connectivity is clearly established. Lack of transport connectivity and poor infrastructure, which act as structural constraints, are the main reasons for high cost of trade transaction and low volumes of intra-regional trade in SAARC. They also limit the positive impact of trade gains that we seek to achieve through tariff liberalization and implementation of trade facilitation measures in the region. Overall, they constrain regional efforts to deepen wide ranging economic cooperation and promotion of people to people contact.

At the Twelfth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad,2004, SAARC leaders emphasized that for our accelerated and balanced economic growth, it is essential to strengthen transportation , transit and communication links across the region. Subsequently, the SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study was conducted with the technical and financial assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in order to enhance transport connectivity among the Member States of SAARC.

In order to give the required impetus to the overall objective of enhanced physical connectivity. SAARC declared 2010-2020 as the ‘Decade of Intra-regional Connectivity in SAARC’. Since the declaration of the Decade, reinvigorated efforts are underway to move speedily towards the goal of improved intra-regional connectivity. Some initiatives that deserve mention are the SAARC Motor Vehicles and SAARC Railways Agreements. Those are awaiting signatures from our member states.it is also worth mentioning that efforts are underway to connect the sub- regions of south Asia by Railways and motor vehicles. Agreements have also been signed between Bangladesh, Bhutan India and Nepal to connect the sub regions by railways and motor vehicles. Another such initiative that merits mention at this interactive session is the Feasibility Study on commercial viability of Demonstration Run of a Container Train between Bangladesh-India–Nepal that has been completed.

Likewise, the Feasibility Study on the SAARC Cargo and Passenger Ferry Service has already been prepared, which is under active consideration of our Member States concerned, namely, India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. A Meeting of Experts drawn from among the SAARC Member States and the ADB will be held in December this year to take forward discussions on this much-awaited sub-regional Ferry Service.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

During the Eighteenth SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in November 2014, our Leaders emphasized on the need to link South Asia with contiguous regions – through “national, regional and sub-regional measures”. I am confident that if we conduct a study it will uncover ample avenues for improving intra-regional connectivity within the region and beyond, particularly Central Asia and South East Asia. South Asia can no longer afford to remain isolated from the outside world

Several inter-governmental mechanisms are in place in order to take forward the agenda of enhanced regional physical connectivity within the SAARC region. Some of the important ones are the mechanisms of the SAARC Transport Ministers that is in vogue since 2007; the Secretary-level Inter-Governmental Group on Transport (*which has held five meetings so far since 2006*) and the Technical Committee on Transport constituted in 2005(*has met four times so far.*)

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

I have every reason to believe that SAARC as regional organization is committed to implement all the SDGs including the ones related to transport.as committed by our leaders during the eighteenth summit south Asia will contextualize the SDGs and in doing so, I’m confident, will develop indicators at SAARC level to compliment the global indicators to follow up to the SDGs .We may also encourage the private sector of the region to make voluntary commitments to implement concrete projects, plans and actions to achieve all the SDGs including on transport.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to once again thank the esteemed Government of Turkmenistan and the United Nations for taking this initiative to organize this important Conference. I am confident that this Conference will be able to show the way forward for ensuring sustainable transport connectivity across our nations, sub-regions and regions for the common good of the humanity at large.

I wish the Conference every success.

I thank you!
