

STATEMENT BY
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13TH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT (THE MINISTERIAL SEGMENT) 20-22 APRIL 2005,
NEW YORK, USA

Item 4 - Statements and Interactive Discussions:
Turning Political Commitment into Action

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

2. It is indeed a great opportunity for me to express my views on this very relevant agenda of the human concern, on which our existence so critically depends. Mr. Chairman since I am taking the floor for the first time, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election and hope that having you in chair this meeting will achieve maximum objectives.

3. At the outset, I may clarify that Pakistan is fully committed and is actively engaged in making arrangements and sparing no efforts to implement the WSSD Plan of Implementation.

4. Mr. Chairman, as far as our specific situation of water is concerned, Pakistan falls in the arid and semi-arid region where most of the area is drought prone and heading fast to be bracketed as a water deficit region. As fresh water is becoming a scarce commodity in relation to its demand, the issue is gaining importance as most of the developing world is suffering from water shortage at large scale. It is an area which has unfortunately not attracted due attention at the national and international levels.

5. In Pakistan water has and will remain a critical source for sustained economic development and human sustenance. Our irrigation network is the largest infrastructure enterprise. Irrigated agriculture provides 90% of food and fiber requirements while "Barani" (rain fed) area contributes the remaining 10%. The irrigated area in Pakistan has increased from 8.4 Mha in 1947 to 18.78 Mha in year 2004 owing to construction of a large number of irrigation networks and huge number of tube-wells. As a result, Pakistan now owns the largest contiguous irrigated area in the world. The Indus Basin System has 3 super dams, 19 river barrages, 12 inter-link canals, 45 vast canal commands, and over 700,000 tube wells mostly owned by individual farmers, besides nearly 18,000 kms of drainage network to dispose of effluent.

6. At present, Mr. Chairman, irrigation accounts for 93% of the water currently utilized in Pakistan. The rest is used for supplies to urban and rural populations and industry. By year 2025, the population will increase by 50%, leading to phenomenal increase in demand for water. To optimize the development of both surface and groundwater, and to get more crop per drop, a realistic National Water Policy (NWP) has been prepared. This policy is expected to contribute to food security and poverty reduction by fostering sustainable increases in the productivity of water through optimal supply and better management.

7. Nonetheless, the future requirements of water both for irrigation and domestic consumption are posing daunting challenges to our planners. The most critical of these is the uneven precipitation in the country where flood situation in the monsoon and drought situation in autumn and winter cause damage to agriculture and infrastructure. Nearly 81% of river flows and 65% of precipitation occur during the three monsoon months, leaving the other nine months almost dry. The quantity and quality of groundwater varies significantly with location. The

Government is actively planning and implementing small and medium sized water reservoirs to meet the requirement of irrigation water.

8. Besides, decrease in per capita availability of fresh water, the problem of water pollution is also intensifying. Management of fresh water resources, their equitable distribution for human consumption, industry and agriculture is being given the highest priority in the context of resource management. The disposal of sewage, industrial waste and agro-chemical run off continue to pose serious threat to the quality of water. The Government is keen to promote public private partnership for waste treatments and to deal with the disposal of sewage and solid waste, both municipal and industrial.

9. In order to purify water from organic and inorganic chemicals, the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) launched "National Water Quality Monitoring Program" in the country on 17th March, 2001. The program aimed at undertaking water quality monitoring in 21 major cities, six rivers and 10 storage reservoirs and lakes.

10. Mindful of the fact that some people in major cities and towns are exposed to hazards of drinking unsafe water, the Government is initiating, large scale schemes to address the problem of unsafe drinking water. As a response, a crash program by the title of Prime Minister's Clean Water Program has been launched. The proposed project intends to provide water purification system combining many different types of water filters and ultraviolet light disinfection units into complete turn-key drinking water system that provide a naturally pure and safe drinking water solution in different cities of Pakistan. The development objective of which is to provide water purification plants of 2000 gallons/hour capacity in different cities of Pakistan consisting of various stages including pre-filtration

works, filtration, purification and ultra-violet disinfection. In total 501 purification plants shall be installed in the country.

11. Regarding sanitation Mr. Chairman, the situation has much improved but still a large number of the population. Five to ten percent of the poorest urban households can not afford sanitation. They include residents in temporary dwelling units where neither owners nor dwellers find it worthwhile to install latrines.

12. Mr. Chairman the water borne diseases are assuming alarming proportion in developing countries, particularly in the South Asia region. Availability of safe drinking water of the WHO standards, in insufficient quantity and the disposal of domestic waste through the assured sanitation system is the dire need of the time. Hepatitis B and C is threatening the life and health of the people.

13. To meet the Government of Pakistan's obligation under the Dhaka Declaration, 23rd October, 2003, (a regional initiative) the Ministry of Environment will organize the 2nd South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN-2005) in November 2005, in Islamabad. The objectives of the Conference are (i) to review SACOSAN-2003 decisions, (ii) to increase outreach of sanitation agenda, (iii) to facilitate development of country-specific as well as regional frameworks for sanitation, (iv) to share experiences and lessons learnt at the regional level in implementing the Dhaka Declaration, (v) to reiterate political commitment at all level in each country to facilitate sanitation agenda in the region, and (vi) develop/review planning framework to achieving the Millennium Development Goal's targets in each country.

14. SACOSAN - 2005 is likely to be attended by more than 400 national and international delegates, including state dignitaries from the South Asian Countries and representatives of various national and international organizations.

15. The process of urbanization has taxed the already inadequate civic amenities and services to a considerable extent. The inadequate shelter to the urban poor continues to be one of Pakistan's most immediate and pressing problems as it is estimated that people living in informal squatter settlements or katchi abadis, range from 35-40% of the total urban population. The Government is fully aware of the problems associated with rapid urbanization and has adopted various long and short term policy measures and development programmes to cope with housing and human settlement problems. The Government has formulated a set of National Policy guidelines on Katchi Abadis (squatter settlements) Urban Renewal and Slums Up-gradation, on the recognition that katchi abadis are an integral part of the urban fabric. In keeping with these objectives the Government has initiated concrete steps for the provision of affordable housing to the poor in order to avoid the emergence of new slums and katchi abadis. The key focus of the policy is towards upgrading katchi abadis at their existing locations as well as grant of ownership rights, besides voluntary resettlement of residents of those katchi abadis the land of which is needed for operational purposes. For this purpose resettlement plans are being finalized in consultation with the communities involved.

16. Having said all this, Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw your attention to our commitment in addressing the critical environment issues. While living within our own resources it is very difficult for us to effectively implement and comply with the obligations of the multilateral environmental agreements already ratified by the Government of Pakistan.

Implementation of all these initiatives would require generous technical and financial assistance. I look forward to the generous support of the international community to enable us achieve the sustainable development objectives and commitment made by Pakistan towards the environmental conservation and management. More important Mr. Chairman, in this context is the capacity building of our institutions, organizations and individuals, for which we depend to large extent on the assistance of developed countries and the international organizations.
