

PM's Address at the Inaugural Session of Delhi Sustainable Development Summit

31 January 2013

“I am very happy to be present here today in the midst of such a distinguished gathering on the occasion of the inaugural session of the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit 2013. I would particularly like to extend a very warm welcome to the numerous foreign dignitaries who have come to Delhi from all over the world to attend this event.

Since 2001, the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit has evolved into a unique gathering in the global sustainable development calendar, attracting and providing a platform for some of the best minds and leaders from all over the world who have an abiding concern for protecting the fragile ecosystems of our planet. I congratulate The Energy and Resources Institute and Dr. Pachauri for this initiative and for their unstinted commitment to sustainable development.

The world community met in Rio last year on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the path-breaking Rio Summit of 1992. Rio+20 was a poignant reminder that the ambitious goals that we had set for ourselves at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 remain far from being realized. It also served to remind us that a meaningful consensus on environmental and ecological issues is perhaps harder to achieve today than it was some 20 years ago.

But, it is not as if we have achieved nothing during this period. We have witnessed an extraordinary and welcome growth of environmental consciousness in the world and we can take great satisfaction from the fact that sustainable development today is an accepted and integral part of international discourse. The global environmental agenda and the global development agenda are now closely inter-linked, with the economic, environmental and social pillars of sustainable development providing a sound framework. The Rio principles of 1992 are still seen as relevant and fundamental, and were reaffirmed at Rio+20.

We in our India take due satisfaction in this development. Some 40 years ago, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was one of the few leaders of the developing world to be present at the Stockholm Conference. Even then, she had made our commitment to environmental protection clear. But she had also pointed out that our challenge was ensuring development for all. It is a matter of some satisfaction to us that recent discourse has seen an implicit understanding that unless we find pathways for development that address the concerns of all, rather than the interests of a select few, our objective of global sustainable development will remain elusive.

In this context, the theme of this year's sustainable Summit, “The Global Challenge of Resource-Efficient Growth and Development”, has a particular resonance. Humanity has traditionally put its faith in advances of technology to resolve problems of resource scarcities. However, there is now a growing realization that there may be no easy alternatives for some resources, particularly environmental resources. Resource-efficiency is, thus, a necessary condition for sustainable development, and a key element of the economic pillar of sustainability.

In addition, there are genuine concerns that in an unequal world, scarcity of resources would affect the poor more adversely, and key resources may become accessible only to a small section of people on this planet, leading to the exclusion of a large number of people who live in poverty and persistent deprivation. Resource efficiency is thus a critical element of inclusive growth and development agenda. The challenge is to build resilient and efficient economies, which will eradicate poverty and also ensure that the poor, already living on the margins of survival, are not made even more vulnerable. As a corollary, we should enhance efforts to develop technologies that ensure efficiency gains, which allow for more equitable distribution and use of these available resources. A global growth model, which is both inclusive and sustainable, would also assist developing countries to pursue their national development objectives.

Climate change has become the face of many challenges in our pursuit of sustainable development. This problem can only be tackled through coordinated global action. It is therefore crucial to look at sustainable development from a global rather than a purely national perspective. Nevertheless, given the varying levels of development across the world, it is important that our responses be predicated on the principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities. I am happy that the recent Doha climate conference reaffirmed these principles. They should form the bedrock of future arrangements post-2020 and we should ensure that the development aspirations and poverty reduction efforts of the developing countries are not constrained.

The adoption of a second commitment period till 2020 under the Kyoto Protocol for emissions reductions by the industrialized world is also a welcome development. But, real progress cannot be achieved if developed countries are not willing to enhance their ambition levels.

For its part, our country is committed to meeting its domestic mitigation goal of reducing the emissions intensity of our GDP by 20-25% by year 2020 compared with 2005 levels. We have already taken several major steps on the path of low carbon growth. Now is the time for the richer industrialized countries to show that they too are willing to move decisively along this path. If they fail to do that in the commitments they will make under the Kyoto Protocol and other agreements, then it will be difficult to persuade governments, industry and the general public in India and other developing countries to step up the pace at which they are moving on this path.

When we talk about efficient use of resources, we have to also focus on many other areas which are crucial in ensuring the sustainability of the earth's ecosystems. Biological diversity is an important environmental resource for developing countries, which touches the lives of common people. We have to ensure that this is preserved and used carefully, gainfully and sustainably. Last year, India hosted the 11th Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biodiversity in Hyderabad. An important outcome was the recognition of biodiversity as a driver of sustainable development and environmental protection and an agreement to create institutional mechanisms that would facilitate financial and technological flows to developing countries for protecting biodiversity. We hope that the decisions taken will be fully implemented.

We in India are fully conscious of the need to conserve our resources through their utilization in a truly sustainable manner. We believe that efficient use of resources has to begin with ensuring the efficiency of use of human resources, and this requires building skills, capabilities and systems by which countries can ensure higher efficiency in every human endeavour. In Hyderabad last year, I announced an allocation of \$50 million as part of the Hyderabad pledge to strengthen the institutional mechanisms for biodiversity conservation in India.

In the field of climate change, our National Action Plan on Climate Change is now an important part of our development strategy, both nationally and at the level of states. One of its eight missions mandates the establishment of 20,000 MW of power generating potential using solar energy within the next 10 years. I also recall launching from this very platform in 2008 the TERI programme on 'Lighting a Billion Lives'. I am informed that this programme has now benefitted around 2000 villages in the country where families and households are using lanterns charged by solar energy to provide them with clean, reliable and pollution-free lighting. This programme has also been extended to countries in Africa and other parts of Asia. The involvement of the private sector has helped in expanding this approach through market-based dissemination of solar lanterns and other forms of decentralized lighting systems based on photovoltaic technology. We invite our international partners to work with us to exploit the tremendous potential of renewable energy technologies in our country.

One resource of particular concern to us in India and in many other developing countries is that of fresh water. The depletion of groundwater has already become a major problem in many districts in our country. Meeting the rising urban demand for fresh water implies rising costs as supplies have to come from great and greater distances. Projections of water demand and availability give an alarming picture of rising scarcities. We need, therefore, to focus attention on water conservation and water efficiency with the sort of zeal that today drives energy conservation and efficiency in the use of energy.

I would also like to mention that protection of the environment and promoting development need not amount to a zero sum game. What is required is regulatory regimes that are transparent, accountable and subject to oversight and monitoring. Indeed, regulatory regimes are often the basic necessary condition to ensure that environmental and economic objectives are pursued in tandem.

Our experience has shown that success in sustainable development efforts is also dependent on the degree of use of innovative mechanisms. Adequate attention should, therefore, be given to the importance and economic value of ecosystem services in development strategies and policies, particularly while addressing the needs of the vulnerable and poor and marginalised communities. Concepts like Green National Accounting are useful tools that could help us ensure that goods and services are produced with minimal ecological and social impact.

Growing populations, changing consumption patterns and the consequent pressure on precious natural resources are real challenges that we face in our pursuit of economic growth and the amelioration of poverty. The present global inequities built into the global economic order are patently unsustainable. At the same time, we also have to share the

ecological and economic space of only one Earth. This in turn will demand re-engineering our economies in ways that are both frugal and innovative in their use of scarce resources. This is where we must look for solutions in the future. India looks forward to working closely with the global community in this endeavour. With these words, I wish the Summit all success in its deliberations and I look forward to specific recommendations for pursuing a resource efficient and sustainable development strategy.

I thank you for your attention.”