

PM's address at the 12th Delhi Sustainable Development Summit

2 February 2012

"I am delighted to be here today at this inaugural session of the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit. I congratulate her Excellency the President of Finland Ms. Tarja Halonen for receiving the coveted Sustainable Development Leadership Award for 2012. We wish her well in her important role as co-chair of the UN High Level Panel on Global Sustainability.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the landmark Rio Earth Summit of 1992 which set out the concept of sustainability and its importance as a critical parameter of human development.

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development of 1992 had stated that the right to development must be fulfilled to equitably meet the needs of present and future generations. It also recognized that eradicating poverty was an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

The idea of sustainability began as a developmental ideal. Over time, it has become an important focus of policy, particularly in developing countries as we struggle to reconcile our effort to develop with the compelling need to protect our environment. Air pollution, industrial pollution, increasing quantum of waste and pollution of our rivers are problems we all face.

There is also growing realization that sustainable development is not something that can be achieved by countries acting individually. The threat of climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions has brought the world to a critical point where the actions of each and every country affect the planet as a whole. Sustainable development in this environment therefore, calls for cooperation of all countries both industrialized and developing. That cooperation must be based on the foundation of the right to development and the need for an equitable distribution of burden.

The need for equity is starkly reflected in the fact that the emissions per capita in industrialized countries are ten to twelve times those of developing countries. We know that total emissions in the world must decline, but what does this imply for emissions in individual countries? We must find a way of solving this problem in a way that does not deprive developing countries of their right to develop.

As a developing country in the frontlines of climate vulnerability, India has a vital stake in the evolution of a successful, rule-based, equitable and multilateral response to issues relating

to climate change. The principles of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change provide the basis for creating a workable framework along these lines. In this context, it is necessary to recognize that currently there appears to be a lack of collective global will to address this problem with the seriousness it deserves. We need to give renewed momentum therefore to the global negotiations for cooperative collective action for management of climate change.

The 17th Conference of Parties at Durban did achieve some important gains. The agreement at Durban on the 2nd Commitment Period of the Kyoto Protocol is a significant achievement because there were doubts at one time about whether any agreement could be reached. I am glad that an agreement was reached. We cannot make progress in this difficult area if we allow the commitments of the past to be unraveled.

In the ensuing negotiations, we will need to focus on the substantive nature of arrangements, based on the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities, more than their legal shape.

As we go forward, we will need to make progress on all the four pillars of cooperative action that were agreed at Bali namely, mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer and development and provision of financial resources and investment. There should be action in all these areas as part of a coherent and organic response to the of problem climate change. In that sense the Durban Platform must build on the Bali Action Plan.

I can assure you that India will play a constructive role in the ongoing negotiations and we will certainly live up to whatever obligations fall upon us as part of a fair and equitable agreement.

On our part, we are progressing with our own national strategy for mitigation and adaptation. Our National Action Plan on climate change is progressing satisfactorily and the eight National Missions are moving ahead. We hope to build a strategy for the Twelfth Five Year Plan which begins in April this year and it will be designed to ensure significant benefits for climate along with inclusive sustainable growth.

Food and energy security and sustainable use of scarce natural resources will constitute important constituents of our strategy for sustainable development. We will seek to reduce the emissions intensity of our GDP by 20-25 percent by the year 2020 taking 2005 as the reference level.

India is one of the mega bio—diverse countries of the world. Our traditional knowledge is both coded as in our ancient texts on Indian systems of medicine, and non-coded, as in oral

traditions. With four global biodiversity hotspots, India ranks amongst the top ten species rich nations.

India was one of the first few countries to enact a comprehensive Biological Diversity Act in 2002 to give effect to the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992. Yet India and the world have miles to go before we can claim notable success in fulfilling the three objectives of the Convention namely, conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits.

I am happy that India is hosting the eleventh Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biodiversity in Hyderabad later this year. I expect the Conference will bring about global consensus and forward-looking action on such major initiatives like operationalisation of access and benefit sharing mechanisms, which will go a long way in promoting community participation in conservation and sustainable use of resources.

I am happy to share with you the heart-warming news that India's tiger population is on the rise. The 2011 tiger census showed a 20 percent increase in the number of tigers over that of the year 2006. We have estimated that there are today around 1700 wild tigers in India out of a global population of around 3,000. I hope that the lessons learnt will be used to conserve other endangered species as well.

I am also happy to state that India's forest cover had increased by nearly 5% between 1997 and 2007 with a small decrease since then. We hope to see further accretion with the implementation of the Green India Mission which aims to increase the forest and tree cover by 5 million hectares and improve forest cover on another 5 million hectares. Eventually these forests will act as a sink that could absorb 50-60 million tons of carbon dioxide annually. This would offset about 6 percent of India's annual emissions.

The Government of India is trying to put in place institutional arrangements and mechanisms to promote policy development and stakeholder engagement on sustainable management of commons.

We have recently established a National Green Tribunal under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010. The Tribunal provides for the effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources. This includes the enforcement of any legal right relating to environment, including providing relief and compensation for damages.

The National Ganga River Basin Authority is yet another example where we are trying institutional innovation to protect the sacred River. The objective of the Authority is to ensure conservation of the river Ganga and to maintain environmental flows by adopting a

comprehensive river basin approach. We hope that the engagement of all stakeholders and this new approach will yield positive results.

The Rio Declaration of 1992 enunciated 27 far reaching principles that sought to protect the integrity of the global environmental and developmental system. These principles have stood the test of time. I urge all those gathered here today to reflect whether they have been given the importance they deserved in establishing a new and equitable global partnership that was the aim of the Rio Declaration. To the extent we have fallen short of those aims, and objectives we must gear ourselves to do better in years to come. That's the challenge and that's also a great opportunity. With these words I once again thank you for listening to me patiently.