

Departamento de Asia y Pacífico

South Asian Association for the Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

Declaration of the Fourteenth SAARC Summit

The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai; the Chief Adviser of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, His Excellency Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the Prime Minister of Nepal, Rt. Hon'ble Mr. Girija Prasad Koirala; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Shaukat Aziz; and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, met at the Fourteenth Summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) held in New Delhi, India on April 3-4, 2007.

2. The Heads of State or Government welcomed the entry of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan into SAARC. This was a historic moment as Afghanistan assumed its rightful place as a valued member of the SAARC fraternity.

3. The Heads of State or Government reiterated their commitment to the principles and objectives enshrined in the SAARC Charter. With the welfare of the peoples of South Asia uppermost in their mind, they agreed to build a Partnership for Prosperity and work towards shared economic cooperation, regional prosperity, a better life for the people of South Asia, and equitable distribution of benefits and opportunities of integration among the peoples and the nations.

4. The Heads of State or Government recognised the importance of connectivity in fulfilling these objectives. It was vital to first have better connectivity within South Asia and then with the rest of the world. They agreed to improve intra-regional connectivity, particularly physical, economic and people-to-people connectivity. They agreed to the vision of a South Asian community, where there was smooth flow of goods, services, peoples, technologies, knowledge, capital, culture and ideas in the region. The SAARC Car Rally, in the run-up to the Fourteenth SAARC Summit, had vividly symbolized this connectivity.

5. The Heads of State or Government recognised that the remarkable growth of the economies of SAARC countries has opened new opportunities to pursue the fight against poverty with firm resolve. They called for deepening of pro-poor orientation of growth process, including through enhancing investment in human capital and infrastructure, increasing budgetary allocations for relevant sectors and improved delivery of services. They reiterated their commitment towards project-based cooperation to strengthen collective efforts in the region.

6. The Heads of State or Government acknowledged that there is a wide range of homegrown best practices and innovative solutions for transforming the lives of peoples in South Asia. They decided to earmark one rural community as SAARC Village in each Member State to showcase these innovative models of development in order to further replicate these across the region.

7. The Heads of State or Government recognised that the implementation of the Social Charter needs focused attention and directed the National Coordination Committees (NCCs) to formulate concrete programmes and projects to complement national implementation efforts. They underscored that civil society organizations have a vital role to play in driving forward the implementation of the Social Charter and directed the NCCs to mobilize civil society organizations to achieve this end.

8. The Heads of State or Government appreciated the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) for its elaboration of the SAARC Development Goals (SDGs), which reflect the regional determination to make faster progress towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They agreed that the national plans for poverty alleviation should appropriately mirror the regional consensus reached in the form of the SDGs and the Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation. Deciding that resource mobilization for achieving the SDGs would remain a high priority in the Decade of Poverty Alleviation, the Leaders directed translation of the highest regional level political commitment into action for creating opportunities for productive employment and greater access to resources for the poor that are essential for them to enhance their livelihood and realize their potentials. They entrusted the Two-tier Mechanism on Poverty Alleviation to monitor the progress and fine-tune the approaches towards pro-poor growth process.

9. The Heads of State or Government recognized the full benefits of an integrated multimodal transport system in the region. They emphasized that this would not be realized unless physical infrastructure and matters relating to customs clearance and other facilitation measures, including multimodal transport operations, were addressed comprehensively. They called for an extension of the SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study (SRMTS) to include Afghanistan as

well. They also called for early implementation of the recommendations contained in the Study in a phased manner. In this context, the Heads of State or Government directed the Inter-Governmental Group on Transport to identify and develop sub-regional and regional projects based on the prioritised recommendations of the SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study (SRMTS) and to develop appropriate regional agreements. They noted the offer of India to hold the Meeting of SAARC Ministers of Transport in New Delhi in 2007. They also directed that pilot projects for improving connectivity be identified and implemented through mutual consultations among the Member States.

10. The Heads of State or Government emphasized that in its third decade of existence, there was an urgent need to move SAARC from declaratory to implementation phase. They directed that the focus of SAARC should be on implementing collaborative projects that are concrete and effective. The SAARC Development Fund (SDF) is an important pillar that would bring concrete benefits to the people of the region. They directed that the SDF be made operational at the earliest. They agreed that the resources for SDF would be mobilised both from within and outside the region. They stressed the importance of decision making and working of the SDF being consistent with the SAARC Charter. They called for early identification and implementation of regional and sub-regional projects under the SDF.

11. The Heads of States or Governments recognized the region's rapidly increasing energy demands for meeting the developmental needs of SAARC countries. They also acknowledged the need of expediting development of conventional sources of energy in a sustainable manner and for strengthening renewable energy development such as in hydropower, bio-fuel, solar and wind. They welcomed the organizing of the first ever South Asia Energy Dialogue in March 2007 in Delhi. They called for early implementation of the recommendations of the Second SAARC Energy Ministers' Meeting to enhance regional cooperation.

12. The Heads of State or Government reiterated their deep concern at the continued degradation of environment and reaffirmed the need to further strengthen cooperation towards protection and conservation of the environment as a priority area. In this regard, while noting the progress in the implementation of the SAARC Plan of Action on Environment, they called for concerted efforts to implement various initiatives under the Plan in a timely manner.

13. The Heads of State or Government expressed satisfaction at the launching of 2007 as the 'Year of Green South Asia'. They reiterated that collaboration in addressing the problem of arsenic contamination of groundwater, desertification and melting of glaciers and assistance to affected peoples should be deepened. They expressed deep concern over global climate change and the

consequent rise in sea level and its impact on the lives and livelihoods in the region. They emphasised the need for assessing and managing its risks and impacts. They called for adaptation of initiatives and programmes; cooperation in early forecasting, warning and monitoring; and sharing of knowledge on consequences of climate change for pursuing a climate resilient development in South Asia. They agreed to commission a team of regional experts to identify collective actions in this regard.

14. The Heads of State or Government stressed the need for closer regional cooperation in the field of information and communication technology. They noted with appreciation the establishment of a collaborative health care project involving a regional telemedicine-network. They directed that steps be taken to extend it to other ICT enabled fields such as education. They agreed to take steps to facilitate rationalization of telecom tariff on a reciprocal basis. They also agreed that national and regional telecom infrastructure should be upgraded to boost people-to-people connectivity in the region.

15. The Heads of State or Government noted with satisfaction timely ratification of SAFTA Agreement by all member countries. They stressed the need for ensuring effective market access through smooth implementation of trade liberalization programme and directed the SAFTA bodies to review the progress on a regular basis. They emphasized that SAFTA should be implemented in letter and spirit. Successful implementation of SAFTA will catalyse other areas of regional economic cooperation. They stressed that to realize its full potential, SAFTA should integrate trade in services. They called for a finalisation of an Agreement in the services sector at the earliest. They also directed that the Agreement on Investment Promotion and Protection be finalized.

16. The Heads of State or Government underlined the importance of implementing trade facilitation measures, especially standardization of basic customs nomenclature, documentation and clearing procedures. They directed that a comprehensive agreement on harmonizing customs procedures be finalised. They also noted that harmonization of technical and phyto-sanitary standards and their implementation in a trade-friendly manner is important in boosting intra-regional trade. They appreciated the establishment of the SAARC Standards Coordination Board that would function as a precursor to the SAARC Regional Standards Body.

17. The Heads of State or Government complimented the SAARC Finance Ministers for finalising the framework of cooperation on financial issues in the region. They expressed satisfaction at the work of the Inter-Governmental Expert Group on Financial Issues.

18. The Heads of State or Government emphasized the need to develop, at an early date, a roadmap for a South Asian Customs Union and a South Asian Economic Union in a planned and phased manner.

19. The Heads of State or Government noted the cultural and social ties among the SAARC countries, based on common history and geography, and reiterated that the future of peoples of South Asia is interlinked. They stressed the importance of people-to-people contact as a key constituent in regional connectivity. They acknowledged the importance of intra-regional tourism and increased exchanges, particularly among the youth, civil society, and parliamentarians. They launched the SAARC Agenda for Culture and directed that annual SAARC Festivals for cultural exchange be institutionalized. They agreed to take measures to charge nationals of SAARC Member States fees for entry into archeological and heritage sites as applicable to their own nationals. They also directed that an enlarged SAARC Scholarship Scheme in ICT and related areas be instituted. They welcomed the offer of Bangladesh to host the First SAARC Youth Camp in 2007.

20. The Heads of State or Government decided to establish the South Asian University in India. They welcomed the signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement establishing the University. They further directed that the Intergovernmental Steering Committee be set up at the earliest to complete its tasks relating to the Charter, bye laws, rules and regulations, curriculum development, business plans and other issues. They also decided to strengthen cooperation and dialogue on educational matters through development of exchanges between academics, experts, policymakers, students and teachers. They called for inter-institutional cooperation, partnerships, and other regional initiatives in the field of education.

21. The Heads of State or Government acknowledged that women's full participation in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process are fundamental for the achievement of equality and development. They noted that many sections of women and children continue to be in disadvantaged positions and lack equal opportunities for economic and social development. They emphasized that women's empowerment should be a major objective of regional cooperation. Regional projects should focus on addressing issues relating to women and children.

22. The Heads of State or Government stressed the need to collectively overcome the challenges of poverty, disease, natural disasters and terrorism. They confirmed that countries of South Asia must work together to deal with these challenges in order to secure the region's collective prosperity.

23. The Heads of State or Government acknowledged that countries of South Asia face challenges of food insecurity and malnutrition. In order to manage emergencies caused by natural and manmade calamities and food shortages, they welcomed the signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement establishing the SAARC Food Bank with the participation of all the SAARC countries. The Food Bank will supplement national efforts to provide food security to the people of the region.

24. The Heads of State or Government noted the challenges confronted by the countries of South Asia in ensuring food and nutritional security as well as in maintaining vibrant rural economy for agricultural development. They underscored the need for enhancing productivity and real wage in rural sectors, and for creating adequate non-farm employment to sustain the progress made in reducing poverty. Noting the constant decline in land availability and biodiversity, depleting soil and natural resources, lowering ground water levels, shrinking farm holdings as well as low and stagnating productivity, they recognized the imperative of reducing the wide gap between yields at the research and the farm level. They stressed, in particular, that South Asian agriculture must benefit from collaborative efforts within and among SAARC countries in developing an effective agriculture research, extension and farmers' linkages, and exchange of farm technology.

25. The Heads of State or Government underlined that terrorism is a threat to peace and security in the region. They condemned the targeted killing of civilians and terrorist violence, in all its forms and manifestations, wherever and against whomsoever committed. The Heads of States or Government affirmed that terrorism violates the principles of the Charters of the United Nations and SAARC and is a clear and present threat to international peace and security. They reaffirmed their commitment to implement all international conventions relating to combating terrorism, to which SAARC Member States were respectively parties, as well as the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and the Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention dealing with the prevention and suppression of financing of terrorism. While urging continued efforts to combat terrorism, the Heads of State or Government also called for urgent conclusion of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

26. The Heads of State or Government agreed to work on the modalities to implement the provisions of the existing SAARC Conventions to combat terrorism, narcotics and psychotropic substances, trafficking in women and children and other trans-national crimes. They expressed their commitment to take every possible measure to prevent and suppress, in particular, financing of terrorist acts by criminalizing the provision, acquisition and collection of funds for such acts, including through front organizations and also to counter illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, trafficking in persons and illicit arms. They reiterated the need for law enforcement authorities of Member States to enhance cooperation in the

prevention, suppression and prosecution of offences under these Instruments. They noted the initiative of India to prepare a draft of SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters and welcomed the offer of Sri Lanka to hold a meeting of Legal Advisers to examine the idea of a draft convention, before the Second Meeting of SAARC Interior/Home Ministers scheduled to be held in October 2007 in India. They also directed them to ensure regular follow-up and implementation of the decisions taken.

27. The Heads of State or Government recognised that corruption was an issue of serious concern and agreed to exchange information on national experience in combating corruption to effectively address this problem.

28. The Heads of State or Government reaffirmed their commitment to a rule-based multilateral trading system. They recalled that the Doha Round was premised on the centrality of development. They directed the Commerce Ministers to work closely to co-ordinate their positions to ensure that the centrality of the development dimension in all areas of negotiations for creating new opportunities and economic growth for developing countries was fully realized. They called upon all members of WTO to show commitment for a successful conclusion of the Doha Round.

29. The Heads of State or Government welcomed the People's Republic of China, Japan, European Union, Republic of Korea and the United States of America, to be associated as Observers to SAARC. The region would benefit from these external linkages and help its economic integration with the international community. The Heads of State or Government also welcomed the Islamic Republic of Iran to be associated as Observer to SAARC.

30. The Heads of State or Government welcomed with appreciation the offer of the Maldives to host the 15th Summit Meeting of the Heads of States or Governments of the South Asian Association for the Regional Cooperation (SAARC).