



Minister Rukman Senanayake, addressing the SACEP meeting held in Colombo

Rukman at SA Environment Programme

The following are excerpts from the address by Rukman Senanayake, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources at the Special Session of the Governing Council Meeting of the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP), 20-21 January 2003 hosted by the ministry:

"SACEP, being a recognized international organisation, has a history of significant achievements in respect of regional co-operation on environmental issues of the countries in the region. SACEP was established in 1981 with Sri Lanka as the host country. This was a pioneering step towards regional co-operation in the field of environment. Since then, SACEP has been able to build partnerships with various donors and international organisations such as NORAD, IMO, SIDA and UNEP. The Male Declaration, which paved the way for intergovernmental collaboration towards the reduction of air pollution and its trans-boundary effects for South Asia, is a great achievement of the UNEP-SACEP collaboration. It was formally endorsed by the ministers of environment of South Asian countries in April 1998 in Male, with the implementation to span three distinct phases. Phase I has now been completed and phase II is expected to mobilise experts and provide monitoring equipment for collaborative experiments relating to trans-boundary air pollution.

We, the members of SACEP, were able to develop the South Asian Oil Spill Contingency Plan and a Memorandum of Understanding for this Regional Contingency Plan. The MOU was taken into consideration at the second intergovernmental Ministerial Meeting of the SACEP seas programme held in June last year, in Sri Lanka. I hope during these two days we will further refine the MOU and consider signing it. I am pleased to mention that my Ministry, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Sri Lanka, has been very co-operative and supportive in the implementation of the South Asian seas programme.

SAARC being a premier regional organization for South Asia, works not only as a political bridge amongst the countries but also provides greater understanding in the economic, environmental, social and cultural spheres. There have been five SAARC Environmental Ministers' meetings, with the fifth held in August last year in Bhutan. Here, the ministers jointly agreed that SACEP would focus on environmental issues, while SAARC would engage primarily in the socio-political arena while providing political guidance to SACEP in its endeavours. This recommendation was forwarded for approval to the SAARC Foreign Ministers' meeting held in Kathmandu in 2002, and I understand it was duly endorsed.

SACEP and SAARC Technical Committee on Environment, Meteorology and Forests both deal directly with regional environmental issues and promote several sustainable development and environmental initiatives. SAARC and SACEP could help by promoting a common approach from the region in international forums. This partnership will be further strengthened by the establishment of working arrangements with SAARC, which is the apex policy-making body for regional cooperation in South Asia.

At this important meeting we will also be discussing the work programme of SACEP for the period 2003-2004. I think we should proactively develop projects and programmes, while also taking action to mobilise international support for these programmes. During the present meeting we can go over the recommendations made in the report of the External Review of SACEP activities by the review panel. This is a 20-year review of the work of SACEP. By taking these recommendations into account in a constructive manner, I hope we will be able to make some changes to SACEP activities. I have no doubt that we will have a meaningful dialogue with respect to these important issues and arrive at some important recommendations by the end of this meeting.

I am proud to mention that as a nation, we have been able to give our wholehearted co-operation and contribute fully towards engagement on regional environmental issues through SACEP. We are delighted and honoured to have you with us in our country. I wish you a pleasant and a fruitful stay in Sri Lanka."