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5th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and Pacific 2005

## Fowzie confirms Ministry commitment to implement national activities

Environment and Natural Resources Minister A. H. M. Fowzie has confirmed the Ministry's commitment to implement national activities in the five year regional implementation plan agreed at the fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific 2005 (MCED 2005) held in Seoul as appropriate in the Sri Lanka context.

The meeting in the Republic of Korea from March 24 to 29 was organised by the United Nations Economic and Social Council and hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea.

Korean Environment Minister Kwak Kyul-Ho was elected Chairperson while Fowzie was elected as one of the Chairpersons. Ministry Additional Secretary W. R. M. S. Wickramasinghe was elected as the Rapporteur of the Conference.

The conference was inaugurated

by the President of the Republic of Korea Roh Moo-Hyun. The inaugural session was also attended by UNEP Executive Director, Dr. Klaus Topfer, ADB President Haruhiko Huroda and Minister of Commerce, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea Hee Beom Lee.

The theme of the conference was 'Achieving Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth in Asia and the Pacific'. This concept is also popularly known as 'Green Growth'. This approach is quite opposite of 'grow first, clean up later' approach and it is aimed at a shift towards environmentally sustainable economic growth.

The Asia and Pacific region is experiencing the fastest economic growth among the regions in the world. However, this rapid economic growth is placing increasing pressure upon the environment and

the natural resources. This region is the home for nearly 60 per cent of the world's population and a major portion of the world's poor. Therefore, the major challenge for the region is to ensure environmental sustainability while pursuing economic growth for poverty alleviation.

The 'Green Growth' is an approach that focuses on reducing the increasing environmental pressure arising from economic growth, thus enabling economic growth to reduce the poverty of the current generation while maintaining the carrying capacity for future generations. One of the fundamental reasons for environmental problems is that the environment is regarded as a free good and the pricing mechanisms do not reflect environmental costs.

The conference endorsed the concept and also highlighted the

need for ensuring better environmental performance through legislation. The conference also recognised the roles of governments, the private sector and also the civil society in 'Green Growth'.

Based on the above assumptions, the conference agreed on a 5 year regional implementation plan for the region from 2006-2010 with main program areas as improving environmental sustainability, enhancing environmental performance, promoting environment as a driver of economic growth and development, and integrating disaster risk management and preparedness in socio-economic development policies and planning.

The conference invited the collaboration of agencies such as UNESCAP, UNDP, UNEP, ADB and other regional and sub-regional organisations to collaborate and facilitate the implementation of this

regional implementation plan. In support of this program, the Government of the Republic of Korea proposed a five-year program called Seoul Initiative on Environmentally Economic Growth (Green Growth) aimed at supporting the countries in the region.

On behalf of the Sri Lankan Government, Fowzie confirmed the Ministry's commitment to implement national activities in the plan as appropriate in Sri Lankan context.

The sixth Ministerial Conference on Environmental and Development will be held in 2010 to review the progress of these activities.

Fowzie also had a bilateral meeting with the Executive Director of United Nations Environment Program and thanked the UNEP's support provided for undertaking assessment of post-tsunami damage to the environment in Sri

Lanka. This study will be completed by the end of April and it will identify areas for post tsunami environmental restoration.

In the capacity of the Chairman of the Governing Council of South Asia Cooperative Environment Program (SACEP), Fowzie had discussions with the Minister of Environment of the Royal Government of Bhutan and exchanged views regarding the future functioning of the organisation. Possible dates for the next governing council meeting to be hosted by the Royal government of Bhutan was discussed and tentatively fixed for the last week of June 2005.

At the bilateral discussions had with the Executive Secretary of UNESCAP, he confirmed the willingness to collaborate with the Government for activities related to the environment management in Sri Lanka.