

Speech of Hon. Anura Priyadarshana Yapa, Minister of Environment

**Regional Seminar on ‘Emerging Issues on Trade, Climate Change and
Food Security: Way Forward for South Asia’**

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Ladies and Gentleman,

It is my great pleasure to be associate with you today for the Regional Seminar on ‘Emerging Issues on Trade, Climate Change and Food Security: Way Forward for South Asia’ organized by the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka and South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment, in partnership with Oxfam Novib, to discuss the current developments that have taken place in relation to trade, climate change and food security at the regional and international levels.

Ladies and Gentleman,

As you are aware, climate change is no longer just one of many environmental and regulatory concerns. It is the major, overriding environmental issue of our time, and the greatest challenge facing

environmental regulators. It is a growing crisis with economic, health and safety, food production, security, and other dimensions.

Shifting weather patterns, for example, threaten food production through increased unpredictability of precipitation, rising sea levels contaminate coastal freshwater reserves and increase the risk of catastrophic flooding, and a warming atmosphere aids the pole-ward spread of pests and diseases.

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a certainty that the present and future generations have to live under the threat of climate change. All nations are affected by the impacts of climate change. However, developing countries like us are particularly vulnerable, due to lack of the necessary adaptive capacity for securing our food production. Climate change will affect all four dimensions of food security; food availability, food accessibility, food utilization and food systems stability. It will have an impact on livelihood assets, food production and distribution channels, as well as changing purchasing power and market flows. Its impacts will be both short term, resulting from more frequent and more intense extreme weather events, and long term, caused by changing temperatures and precipitation patterns.

Ladies and gentlemen

Most sectors of the global economy are affected by climate change and these impacts will often have implications for trade. Many of the sectors impacted, such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism, are critical for South Asian countries. Climate change is likely to alter the comparative advantage of these countries in such sectors, and thereby alter the pattern of international trade. Moreover, climate change is expected to have an impact on trade infrastructure and transportation routes. By the same token, trade may provide a means to bridge differences in demand and supply, so that

countries where climate change creates scarcity are able to meet their needs by importing from countries where these goods and services continue to be available.

Ladies and gentlemen

Unless the emissions of greenhouse gases are curbed significantly, their concentrations will continue to rise, leading to changes in temperature, precipitation, and other climate variables that will undoubtedly affect agriculture and food security and affect the world economy and international trade.

Ladies and gentlemen

There is a direct link between the effects of trade on the amount of greenhouse gas emissions. International trade involves emissions of greenhouse gases through the transportation of goods. On the other hand, trade opening could facilitate both the adoption of technologies that reduce the emission-intensity of goods and their production process and the change in the mix of a country's production from energy-intensive sectors towards less energy-intensive sectors. By increasing the diffusion of mitigation technologies, in which trade liberalization can help mitigate climate change.

Ladies and gentlemen

As you are aware, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted to stabilize the greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system. In 1997, increased political momentum led to the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, which establishes specific and binding emission reduction commitments for industrialized countries. The challenge now facing climate change negotiators is to agree

on a multilateral response to climate change after the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period has expired in this year. In order to address this, last year in Durban, at COP 17, parties agreed to launch a Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action to develop a new legal outcome under the convention highlighting the needs of mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology development and transfer and capacity building.

Ladies and gentlemen

In the context of the ongoing WTO Doha Round of negotiations, some multilateral work is also taking place that could contribute positively to mitigation efforts. WTO members are focusing on ways of further strengthening cooperation and coherence between the WTO and multilateral environmental agreements, such as the UNFCCC. Moreover, negotiators are working on "the reduction, or as appropriate, elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to environmental goods and services". The objective is to improve access to more efficient, diverse and less expensive environmental goods and services on the global market, including goods and services that contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Ladies and gentlemen

However there are further concerns on trade and climate change issues which are discussed at the WTO and UNFCCC negotiations. For example one such concern is whether UN climate change discussions on the role of intellectual property undermine WTO intellectual property rules. At the same time, proposed unilateral trade measures by the developed countries under UNFCCC is also a concern because it directly affects the economies of developing countries.

Ladies and gentlemen

This regional seminar will provide a platform to discuss the emerging issues on trade, climate change and food security relevant to the South Asian countries which enable to prepare an advocacy agendas on the way forward for South Asia. At the same time this seminar will facilitate to build alliance and networking with relevant stakeholders and the media from different SAARC countries to take related advocacy agendas forward.

Ladies and gentlemen

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka and South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment, and Oxfam Novib for organizing this timely important event and pledge our continued support and collaboration to seek innovative and scientific solutions to address the climate change issues that are evidently threatening the nation's stability and progress.

I Thank You
