

APA 14th Plenary Session
“Fostering Regional Cooperation for Sustainable Development in Asia”

Excellency, Hon. Ms. Sahiba Gafarova, Speaker of the Mili Majlis,

Hon. Speakers, Hon. Deputy Speakers

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon,

Allow me to express my sincere appreciation to the Milli Majlis for graciously hosting the APA 14th plenary session and for the exceptional hospitality extended to my delegation and me throughout our stay in Baku.

It is an immense privilege to address you today on a topic that resonates deeply with the shared aspirations and challenges faced by nations in our vibrant and diverse continent – fostering regional cooperation for sustainable development in Asia.

Excellency, Distinguished delegates, as we embark on this crucial journey, let us draw inspiration from success stories that highlight the transformative power of collaboration. One such shining example lies in the Maldives, a nation that has been at the forefront of sustainable development initiatives. Despite our limited resources, the multiple imminent threats we face from climate change requires the Maldives to take bold, substantial steps to assure our climate resilience. One such initiative is an ambitious national goal to reach net zero by 2030 in

reducing greenhouse gas emissions by removing more carbon from the atmosphere than it emits with the help and support from international organisations. Through the harnessing of renewable energy sources like solar power, and innovative policies in waste management and marine conservation, the Maldives exemplifies how regional cooperation can lead to resilient and sustainable solutions.

In the past five years, the Maldives has made great strides in enacting the first ever legislations on energy, climate change, water & sewerage, and waste management. Some of which are national targets on reaching net zero by 2030 and be fully carbon negative with regards to human-made greenhouse gas emissions. For instance, phasing out single use plastics, introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility policies, and the establishment of independent authorities to regulate the utility services in our nation. These legislations will aid in regulating the management of our natural resources to ensure a much safer environment for all of us in the nation.

As an upper middle-income country, our access to affordable climate finance is extremely limited. It takes years for funds to reach the Maldives for projects approved through multilateral bodies. By the time the funds reach us, the impacts of erosion are so severe, that the entire project has to be redesigned.

Therefore, we in the Maldives have made climate adaptation a national priority as we cannot stand by and wait until the world unanimously unifies on reducing greenhouse gases to limit global temperature rise to

below 1.5 degrees. We are doing as much as we can in our country with our limited national resources, and we will continue to do so.

The Maldives' commitment to sustainable development is not an isolated case; it mirrors the growing trend across Asia. The Greater Mekong Subregion, for instance, has witnessed collaborative efforts among countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. These nations have come together to promote sustainable agriculture, cross-border infrastructure development, and joint initiatives for biodiversity conservation. By sharing resources and expertise, they have successfully uplifted the lives of their citizens while preserving the unique ecosystems that define their region.

Closer to our home in India is where the International Solar Alliance is based, bringing together countries to identify and strengthen their potential for solar energy use. Another example is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) showcases the power of collaboration in addressing regional challenges. Member nations, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and others, have worked together to establish the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, promoting joint research and conservation efforts. This cooperative approach recognizes that environmental sustainability is a shared responsibility that transcends national borders.

Similarly in the Indian Ocean region the Maldives collaborates with other Indian Ocean states to advocate for progressive policies on sustaining vulnerable tuna stocks that are so vital to the Maldives' economy and way

of life. The Maldives, with our pole and line fishing practices, highlights one of the most sustainable tuna fisheries in the world, but as tuna is a migratory species, we urge others in the region to adopt more sustainable fishing practices that would aid in safeguarding our oceans from more harm.

Fostering regional cooperation for sustainable development requires recognizing each nation's unique challenges and perspectives. Embracing diversity and learning from one another's experiences are essential for success. This collaboration offers an opportunity to work together on sustainable practices, balancing economic viability with environmental and social responsibility.

As we navigate the path towards sustainable development in Asia, let us remember that our actions today determine the legacy we leave for future generations to come. By fostering partnerships, sharing knowledge, and collectively addressing the challenges we face, we can build a future where prosperity is not achieved at the expense of our mother earth or the well-being of our fellow citizens.

Finally, I would also like to address the deeply concerning crisis in Palestine. The Maldives stands strongly in sympathy with the Palestinian people, affirming the international community's calls for an immediate ceasefire and a peaceful conclusion to the long-running conflict. As we emphasise the necessity of regional collaboration for long-term development, let us also renew our commitment to peace, justice, and the well-being of all peoples in Asia and beyond.

In conclusion, let us celebrate the successes of nations like the Maldives and others in Asia, learning from our common experiences, and using them as beacons of hope and inspiration. As we foster regional cooperation, let us strive to create a legacy of sustainability, resilience, and shared prosperity for the diverse and dynamic continent of Asia.

Thank you.