

PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH ON RELEASE OF CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

JUNE 30, 2008; NEW DELHI

It is my pleasure to welcome you all on the occasion of the formal launch of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change. With this launch, the Government has fulfilled its solemn commitment to announce the National Plan by the middle of this year. This reflects the great importance we attach to mobilizing our national energies in meeting the challenge of climate change.



Without a careful long-term strategy, climate change may undermine our development efforts, with adverse consequences, across the board, on our people's livelihood, the environment in which they live and work and their personal health and welfare. It is also a challenge which encompasses the interests of both present and future generations. We have the moral responsibility to bequeath to our children a world which is safe, clean and productive, a world which should continue to inspire the human imagination with the immensity of the blue ocean, the loftiness of snow-covered mountains, the green expanse of extensive forests and the silver streams of ancient rivers. This is a world which we hold in trust, a world which has created and nurtured life for countless generations.

Today, climate change, generated by the cumulative accumulation of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere, through human economic activity, threatens our planet. There is a real possibility of catastrophic disruption of the fragile life-sustaining ecological system that holds this world together. Science is now unequivocal on this assessment.

India has a civilizational legacy which treats Nature as a source of nurture and not as a dark force to be conquered and harnessed to human endeavour. There is a high value placed in our culture to the concept of living in harmony with Nature, recognizing the delicate threads of common destiny that hold our universe together. The time has come for us to draw deep from this tradition and launch India and its billion people on a path of ecologically sustainable development.

Our people have a right to economic and social development and to discard the ignominy of widespread poverty. For this we need rapid economic growth. But I also believe that ecologically sustainable development need not be in contradiction to achieving our growth objectives. In fact, we must have a broader perspective on development. It must include the quality of life, not merely the quantitative accretion of goods and services. Our people want higher standards of living, but they also want clean water to drink, fresh air to breathe and a green earth to walk on. The National Action Plan we announce today really incorporates India's vision of sustainable development and the steps we must take to implement it.

The Plan encompasses a very broad and extensive range of measures. That is how it should be since the challenge we face is both complex and cross-cutting in nature. Nevertheless, we have decided to focus our national energies on Eight National Missions which will be pursued as key components of our strategy for sustainable development. These include National Missions on Solar Energy, on Enhanced Energy Efficiency, on Sustainable Habitat, on Conserving Water, on Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, on creating a "Green India", on Sustainable Agriculture and finally, on establishing a Strategic Knowledge Platform for Climate Change.

Our vision is to make India's economic development energy-efficient. Over a period of time, we must pioneer a graduated shift from economic activity based on fossil fuels to one based on non-fossil fuels and from reliance on non-renewable and depleting sources of energy to renewable sources of energy. In this strategy, the sun occupies center stage, as it should, being literally the original source of all energy. We will pool our scientific, technical and managerial talents, with sufficient financial resources, to develop solar energy as a source of abundant energy to power our economy and to transform the lives of our people. Our success in this endeavour will change the face of India. It would also enable India to help change the destinies of people around the world.

In pursuing this and other ambitious goals, I believe we have the greatest assets in the wisdom, creativity and enterprise of our people. The Plan intends to go beyond government to draw upon these assets. In pursuing the National Action Plan, we are conscious that we live in an age of rapid change and uncertainty. Thus the Plan is not a fixity. It is meant to evolve and change in the light of changing circumstances, developments in science and technology and in the global regime that is currently being fashioned through multilateral negotiations.

Climate Change is a global challenge. It can only be successfully overcome through a global, collaborative and cooperative effort. India is prepared to play its role as a responsible member of the international community and make its own contribution. We are already doing so in the multilateral

negotiations taking place under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The outcome that we are looking for must be effective. It must be fair and equitable. Every citizen of this planet must have an equal share of the planetary atmospheric space. Long term convergence of per capita emissions is, therefore, the only equitable basis for a global compact on climate change.

In the meantime, I have already declared, as India's Prime Minister, that despite our developmental imperatives, our per capita GHG emissions will not exceed the per capita GHG emissions of the developed industrialized countries. This should be testimony enough, if one was needed, of the sincerity of purpose and sense of responsibility we bring to the global task on hand.

The National Action Plan owes its appearance to the wisdom, expertise and dedication of a large number of people. I must thank all the members of the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, and in particular Shri Kapil Sibal, Minister of Science & Technology, Dr. Chidambaram, Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government and Shri Shyam Saran, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister for Climate Change who oversaw the final drafting of the Plan. My own Ministry, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, played a seminal role in all our deliberations, under the leadership of Shri Meena, Minister of State.

I must also record my appreciation of the contributions of the Ministries of Power, New and Renewable Energy, External Affairs, and the Planning Commission. The Plan should be the subject of national debate. It will evolve and improve through a much wider interaction than has been possible so far. The Government, for its part, intends to move quickly to establish the various National Missions and come up with detailed plans for execution of specific projects. We would welcome international cooperation to supplement and support our national effort.

I wish to conclude by recalling Mahatma Gandhi's sagacious message not only to the people of India, but to the world at large: The earth has enough resources to meet the needs of people, but will never have enough to serve their greed. This is the spirit which must underlie any strategy for sustainable development.

Thank you.