
Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe addresses the World Climate Conference in Geneva

Thursday, 03 September 2009

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Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe addressed the High Level Segment of the World Climate Conference-3 which is being held in Geneva, delivering a policy statement on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka. The week-long conference, which began on 31 August, will conclude its deliberations on Friday 4 September with a High Level Declaration which was also adopted by consensus today.

The High Level Segment was declared open by the Secretary-General of the UN Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and President of Mozambique Mr. Armando Emilio Guebuza, and Federal Counsellor and former President of Switzerland Mr. Moritz Leuenberger, the Co-Chairs of the Conference. The Keynote address was delivered by Dr. Rajendra Kumar Pachauri, the Chair of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change. High-level dignitaries, including the Presidents of Tajikistan, Ethiopia, and Slovenia, the Vice Presidents of Tanzania and Comoros, and the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh and Cook Islands, and many Ministers are addressing the High Level Segment today and tomorrow. Minister Samarasinghe met with the Secretary-General of the UN Mr. Ban Ki-moon. He also had a separate meeting with Prof. Walter Kalin, Representative of the UN Secretary-General on human rights of IDPs. The full text of Minister's statement is as follows:

“Distinguished Co-Chairs, Hon. Ministers, High Level Dignitaries, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, At the outset, on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, let me welcome the adoption of the High Level Declaration by consensus today. Also, permit me to express my appreciation to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the other partners for organizing this important conference which is being conducted at a very critical juncture. We welcome the main objective of this conference which is to bring together science-based information on climate change to guide policy-making, planning and practice across the planet. Speaking as I do from an Asian perspective – a continent in which several developing states, including small island developing states are located – such timely and comprehensive information sharing is vitally important not only to the wellbeing and developmental processes, benefiting communities and peoples, but also to address core issues of survival of some of the most vulnerable segments of national populations. As a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and a country that participated in the development of the South Asian Comprehensive Regional Framework on Disaster Management adopted by the SAARC Council of Ministers for the 2006 – 2015 period, climate change adaptation is gaining more importance as an integral component of disaster management and the availability of user defined, customizable information to national and regional planners and policy makers. Distinguished Co-Chairs, Since the First World Climate Conference was held in 1979 in Geneva, climate change has long been identified as a multifaceted key developmental challenge. If allowed to go unaddressed, the phenomenon can potentially have devastating impacts for many of the world's citizens. Just as the problems are complex and diverse, the global community's responses have been equally varied. The institutional responses that have evolved, including the establishment of intergovernmental mechanisms such as the WMO, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and associated processes, demonstrate that this complex issue needs to be dealt with through a multitude of approaches and institutional arrangements. To my mind, the development of a Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS) involving a partnership of scientists and policy-makers, is a vital step towards sharing information to facilitate better decision-making. The multi-stakeholder approach that we seek to encourage in this process will also result in a wide range of inputs that can only improve eventual outcomes. It is also noteworthy that every effort is being made to develop synergies between what are essentially parallel and not divergent processes with one overall objective – to benefit all peoples and communities that we are committed to serve. The outcome of these processes must be in compliance with the provisions of the UN Framework on Climate Change Convention which has 190 Parties. We need to view this conference as a significant event on a single continuum of initiatives being taken to respond more effectively to climate change. Just as the GFCS envisages the marriage of existing initiatives with a new information management and delivery system, it is our view that there should be consistency and harmonization of international and inter-governmental efforts which will better enable us – as a global community facing a common threat – to deal more effectively with the challenges posed by the climate change. As the Minister in charge of the subject of Disaster Management, I am particularly enthused by the potentialities the GFCS might offer in terms of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster risk management (DRM). Information is critical, particularly relating to longer-term predictions that enable us to prepare better for the exigencies brought about by climate change. Also, as the Minister in charge for the subject of human rights, I appreciate the possibilities that this instrumentality gives us to ensure that human security, expressed in terms of freedom from fear and freedom from want, are guaranteed. Seminal issues of human rights connected with physical safety and security, the right to a livelihood, the right to food, safe water, right to community and of a healthy environment are all threatened by climate change. As policy makers, it is vital that we should base our plans and policies on the best information available so that we are able to gain optimum results for the benefit of our communities. As was pointed out in the outcome document of the Second Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction held in this city barely 3 months ago, which I had the opportunity to participate in, climate change is already seen to greatly magnify the disaster risks threatening many developing countries. It is becoming apparent that an increasing scale and frequency of humanitarian emergencies is stretching both local and international capacities to respond to these disasters. The advent of slow-onset disasters and the associated food insecurity, among other threats to human security, are significant challenges. At the June 2009 session, it was noted that addressing the underlying drivers of disaster risk therefore offers the potential for a threefold gain – for adaptation, DRR and poverty reduction. The GFCS must also contribute to efforts at addressing impacts on the future development of human settlements. Ways and means must be found to combine these efforts and knowledge with the recent thrust to maximize inputs of indigenous knowledge on DRR. Education across sectoral boundaries of national and

sub-national stakeholders relating to the use of this information in all processes across all fields – health and environmental management, business, construction, tourism, community development, water management, agricultural services including research, coastal management, highways and transportation, should also be a priority. Finally, there must be sufficient capacity-building among national meteorological and hydrological services and the dissemination of this information to national and regional leaders and policy makers, encouraging user uptake in order to make the larger aims and objectives of this conference a reality. In conclusion, the delegation of Sri Lanka warmly appreciates the dedication of those who have sought to make this conference a meaningful and relevant event and commits itself to working closely with all its partners in working towards the achievement of commonly agreed upon goals. We welcome the free and frank dialogue that led to the key decisions and the final outcome of this conference, which will eventually engender the most inclusive, representative and democratic results. I thank you for your kind attention.”

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