

Speech by Dr Manmohan Singh  
Honourable Prime Minister of India at  
The inaugural session of the Delhi Sustainable Development  
Summit – 2011  
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“I don't know how to thank TERI and Dr. Pachauri for the honour they have conferred on me. I have no words to express my gratitude to Dr. Pachauri and the management and staff of TERI for having chosen me for this very prestigious, distinguished award and I deem it a real honour because the award that I am receiving at the hands of President Hamid Karzai, Mr. James Michel, Mr Leonel Fernández. This is a rare honour in my life and I am very very obliged to TERI that has chosen me for this award. I am very pleased to address this gathering on the occasion of the 11th Delhi Sustainable Development Summit being organized by TERI. The Summit, has been held every year for the past ten years, and has now become an important annual landmark in the international discourse on sustainable development.

The theme of the Summit, “Tapping Local Initiatives and Tackling Global Inertia” reflects the fact that we have to act at two levels, - the local and the global – in dealing with the issue of sustainable development. We require collective action at both levels so that local good and global good can be aligned and can reinforce each other.

The concern for ecological sustainability is not a new phenomenon. In fact, India has a long cultural tradition of frugality and simple living in harmony with nature. All great religions which have traversed in our country have preached the unity of humankind with nature.

An ancient hymn from the Upanishads reminds us of this.

Peace on earth, peace in space, peace for the trees, peace towards cattle, peace towards goats.

Unfortunately this symbiotic relationship weakens as societies develop and as population begins to rise. But modern societies cannot get away from the fact that if they damage the environment in the pursuit of material gains today, they do so by risking the well being of future generations to come.

That to my mind summarises the development challenge which the emerging market countries face. Let me share some thoughts with you on how we could approach this problem.

The central principle that must be enshrined in any sustainable development strategy is that incentives facing all economic decision makers must encourage them to act in a manner that is environmentally benign.

The solution lies in two dimensions. First, we must put in place a structure of regulatory policies which will prevent potentially damaging behaviour. This is what we do by setting regulatory standards and enforcing them. I must emphasise that standards are not enough. They must also be enforced which is often difficult. It is also necessary to ensure that these regulatory standards do not bring back the License Permit Raj which we sought to get rid of in the wake of economic reforms of the early nineties.

Second, we must deal with residual pollution that may be caused despite regulatory efforts. The principle that should be followed in such cases is that the polluters must pay. This will discourage the polluters and also provide a means of financing the corrective steps necessary to counter the pollution caused. We in India are trying to do this by setting appropriate standards in several areas especially in the most energy using industries. As a general rule we are trying to establish the principle that the polluter must pay though that is much more difficult to achieve in all cases. Last year, for example we introduced a cess of 5% on the use of coal both domestic or imported to build the corpus of a National Clean Energy Fund.

Another aspect of sustainability is the management of common pool resources. In India, as in many other developing countries, indigenous tribes, cattle rearing groups, as well as cultivators use and access common pool resources like forests, water bodies, pastures and farmland without clearly defined property rights. The traditional wisdom on the management of such commons was that they would tend to get over-used if individuals were left free to exploit them for their individual ends and therefore, these common resources, and related environmental matters, should be managed by central authorities and governments.

This conventional view is challenged now by new research in economics, ecology and the environment. The Noble Laureate, Dr. Elinor Ostrom and her associates have demonstrated that in such situations local action for managing common resources through cooperative activities by small user groups can lead to optimal results provided the stakeholders are adequately informed and also empowered to act. This has profound implications for policy makers.

In India, we enacted landmark legislation in 2006 popularly called the Forest Rights Act that seeks to assure the rights of millions of tribal and other forest dwellers by restoring to them both individual rights to cultivated forest land and community rights over common property resources. We hope this will spur local initiative on a sustainable use of resources, conservation of bio-diversity and maintenance of ecological balance.

Needless to say, capacity building is a major issue in any such effort. Effective village level planning and decision making can only occur if capacities are built up at the local level. This is clearly an area where much more needs to be done. We are trying to restructure the implementation of our development programmes to strengthen local bodies and empower them to act in their common collective interest.

The growth in environmental awareness and the capacity to manage local environmental problems is a very positive development. However, local or national action would be of no avail when the externalities cross natural boundaries, as in the case of climate change.

For example, even if India were able to eliminate all its greenhouse gas emissions, we will not make a significant difference to our climate since our emissions account for only 4% of the global total. The solution for this particular problem clearly lies in coordinated global action.

Our view has been that those who have been primarily responsible for the build up of greenhouse gases and who also have the greatest capacity to act should bear the brunt of the responsibility. Developing nations are obviously much less culpable, and have a much greater need for continued growth. These countries should be helped to achieve sustainable development paths.

The most recent Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC at Cancun in Mexico did not resolve these problems, but it did produce some modest results. I compliment Mexico and its

leadership for its outstanding leadership and stewardship of the Summit, and for achieving some forward movement. This shows that with collective will, building a meaningful international consensus is still possible even though it is turning out to be more difficult than before.

India particularly welcomes the agreement on the setting up of a network of technology innovation centres under the UNFCCC to foster local adaptation and mitigation measures. India had proposed this at the very outset of the current round of multilateral negotiations.

India will continue to play a constructive and responsible role in the on-going negotiations and will work with the international community to find practical, pragmatic and equitable solutions.

I would also like to emphasise that even as we wait for meaningful agreements on global mitigation action, we in India have committed ourselves to keeping our per capita consumption below the average for the industrial countries. This is an important commitment since it ensures that if industrial countries do more themselves to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, which they should, they also automatically ensure that our emissions will also be contained. In fact, the faster the industrialised countries reduce their per capita emissions, the quicker will be the self imposed constraint which requires action in our country.

We are also taking action on our own in the form of a National Action Plan on Climate Change. A broad objective that we have set is to reduce the emissions intensity of our GDP by 20% between 2005 and 2020. We have already launched seven missions in the following areas. These include: energy efficiency, solar energy, sustainable habitat, water, sustaining the Himalayan ecosystem, agriculture and strategic knowledge for climate change. We will shortly launch the last of the 8 National Missions under the Plan, which is called Green India, which will result in the regeneration of 6 million hectares of degraded forest land.

We are currently engaged in preparing for the Twelfth Five Year Plan which will cover the period 2012-2017. The Plan will focus on specific initiatives needed to put our development on a path consistent with low carbon growth. Energy efficiency and exploitation of renewable energy sources will receive a special emphasis.

India, China and many other developing countries have all responded with significant voluntary goals and specific plans on emission intensity reduction. But, if we have to tackle global inertia, we will need to see clear commitments from the industrial countries on emission reduction targets for 2020 that are consistent with the Copenhagen goal of containing the likely temperature increase to no more than 2 degree centigrade or less. We do not as yet have a response from the industrialised countries which is consistent with meeting that objective. So, here is a viable agenda for concerted global action to deal with the problem of climate change.

In the final analysis, we have to recognise that the world must move away from production and consumption patterns which are carbon-intensive and energy-intensive. Without this shift in the patterns of energy generation and use, ecologically sustainable development will remain mostly a pious aspiration if not merely a buzz word. We have to make changes in our lifestyles, particularly in the developed world, and learn to make do with less. In developing countries, poverty eradication will have to be linked to the availability of clean, renewable and affordable energy. I believe that charting these new pathways is not beyond our collective imagination. Life as we know it on our beautiful planet is at stake.

With these words, I wish the deliberations at the Summit all success.”