



PRESS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES,
LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

High Representative welcomes ‘Saarc Year of Good Governance’

New York, 05 April: The UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury, has hailed the outcome of the just-concluded Saarc Summit as a major boost to development efforts in the region.

Mr. Chowdhury said that the summit’s designation of the year 2008 as the “Saarc Year of Good Governance” would promote and help consolidate good governance in the region, including empowering the poor and other vulnerable groups.

“Not only is the participation of the poor and other marginalised groups, including women, in the political and decision making processes a worthy end in itself, but it is also essential to eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development,” he said. “The decision of the Saarc leaders to promote good governance right from the highest political level is therefore highly commendable.”

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) has eight member states. They include five Least Developed Countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal), three of which are also Landlocked Developing Countries (Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal) and one is a small Island Developing State (Maldives). The other members are India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The summit, which was held in the Indian capital, New Delhi, stressed the need to focus on women empowerment and participation in decision-making processes. The third commitment of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries adopted in Brussels in 2001 calls on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to empower the poor through social inclusion and effective participation in the governance process.

The summit also pledged greater connectivity in trade and movement of people and decided to extend the Saarc Regional Multimodal Transport Study to the association’s latest member, Afghanistan.

“Inadequate transport and communication networks remain a hindrance to trade and other economic activities both within the region and with the rest of the world, particularly for the three

landlocked countries and Maldives, which is a small island,” Mr. Chowdhury said. He said that in line with the Almaty Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries and in the spirit of South-South cooperation, Saarc provides immense opportunities for improving transit transport and communication in the region.

The High Representative also welcomed the summit’s decision to establish a Saarc Development Fund, a Saarc Food Bank and to accelerate the realisation of a South Asia Customs Union.

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