



Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA)

**The Secretary General Report on
Environmental Issues,
Global Warming, and
Planting Billions of Trees throughout Asia**

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Background

The Second Session of the Plenary of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly in paragraph 18 of its Resolution on Economic and Sustainable Development, contained in document APA/Economic Com/200/2007/01, decided to establish a Sub-Committee of Environmental and Global Warming under the Standing Committee of Economic and Sustainable Development of APA to call a special meeting in the Republic of Korea in 2008 to deal with environmental issues as well as global warming, planting of billions of trees throughout Asia and submit its report, including its Plans of Action to the Plenary.

The Republic of Korea later informed the Secretariat that it would be prepared to host the meeting of the Sub-Committee on Environmental Issues, Global Warming and Planting of Billions of Trees throughout Asia in 2009. Subsequently, the Syrian Arab Republic graciously offered to host the Sub-Committee Meeting in Damascus on 21-22 July 2008.

On 23 June 2008, the Secretary-General communicated with all Member Parliaments and sought their views and those of their governments on environmental issues, global warming and planting billions of trees throughout Asia.

The present Report of the Secretary-General is submitted to the Sub-Committee for its consideration.

Introduction

Asia and the Pacific is the largest region in the world with rich and diversified natural resources. However, according to ESCAP State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific 2005, its freshwater availability per capita is the lowest of all global regions, its biologically productive area per capita is less than 60 percent of the global average, and its arable and permanent crop land per capita is less than 80 percent of the global average. Furthermore, two thirds of the global population, the majority of the world's undernourished and two thirds of the world's poor live in this region. Equally important is that more than 600 million people are without safe drinking water, around 1.9 billion people do not have access to improved sanitation, more than 800 million people have no access to electricity, and millions are prone to diseases.

In order to remedy these deficiencies, Asia and the Pacific developing countries have made every effort to achieve economic growth and they have accomplished some success in this regard. The speed of economic growth in Asia and the Pacific developing countries is higher than global growth rates. According to ESCAP, more than one third of the 17 fastest-growing Asian and the Pacific countries are among least developed countries.

In this region, the push for economic growth based on unsustainable growth patterns has threatened the environment. Therefore, it is necessary to reconcile economic growth with environmental protection objectives.



Environmental Performance vs. Sustainable Development

Environmental problems have affected the whole planet Earth. Since early 1990s, great efforts have been made at the international level to address these problems and national, regional and global commitments have been defined to protect the environment. Although Asian governments have attempted to improve the environment, they seem to have focused more on other causes of environmental problems than on the rapidly changing consumption and production patterns as root causes of environmental degradation.

There is a link between the consumption and the production. Changing consumption patterns define growing production patterns. To give an example in this regard, one can refer to the lifestyle in an urban area which is characterized by energy and high waste production. A normal individual in an urban area uses three times the water as a person living in a rural area.

Changing consumption patterns have influenced the use of resources. For instance, water shortage has been identified as a problem for many areas in Asia, as over-extraction and pollution have been responsible for degradation of surface and groundwater resources.

In order to address environmental challenges, Asian countries may consider, in due time, defining Asia Sustainable Development Strategy (ASDS) which can identify a roadmap for implementing sustainable development in Asia covering economic, social, environmental and financial aspects. ASDS requires new and clean environmental technologies which can add to economic growth. These technologies would lead to a better environment while investing in them would create jobs.

The Asian governments should do their utmost to educate the general public on environmental issues and persuade it to protect the environment. Educational programs should be established to promote environmental awareness. Furthermore, at the national level, environmental taxes and charges particularly to those who pollute most may be applied. One other important endeavor on the part of the governments is to define the industrial policy of the country which should comprise of environmental and sustainable development policies. Within the energy policy, National Action Plans (NAPs) may be designed to achieve yearly energy savings.

The Role of Asian Parliaments

The parliaments may give priority to sustainable development in the preparation of legislations as well as in the allocation of national budget. They may also stress that sustainable development must be a guiding principle for all government activities. Bearing in mind that most Asian countries are among developing countries, a balance needs to be created between the prerogatives for development of these countries and protection of their environment. In other words, while the Asian developing countries are expected to protect their environment, they should be provided with financial and technological assistance to do so.

The Asian parliaments may adopt the following measures:



- a) Working closely with the Asian governments to generate funds, from developed countries and international financial institutions, for new technologies to combat the environmental degradation,
- b) Considering a ban on imports of all outdated and polluting technologies,
- c) Transferring a proportion of road transport to more environmentally friendly modes of transport,
- d) Levying an environmental tax on all unsustainable activities,
- e) Strengthening environmental aspects of all legislative proposals,
- f) Adopting a sustainable development strategy with a view to achieving the Asia Sustainable Development Strategy (ASDS),
- g) Adopting a national action plan to achieve yearly energy savings,
- h) Phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies in the budget,
- i) Devoting special attention, in the budget, to increasing environmental awareness among the general public,
- j) Allocating more budget to activities of the government's environmental department,
- k) Overseeing the government's activities related to the environment, including holding hearings with the participation of officials directly involved in environmental issues,
- l) Working with other APA Member Parliaments to improve legislations in the field of sustainable development, particularly on environmental issues, and to come up with common guidelines for better protection of the environment in Asia.

Climate Change

Temperatures are rising all across the globe and warming of the climate system is indisputable. Over the past 100 years, the world mean temperature has increased by 0.7 degree Celsius and most of the warming is attributed to the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) that is increasingly concentrated in the atmosphere.

Activities of human beings such as deforestation and burning of fuels, including fossil fuels, have contributed to the climate change. Global warming has caused floods, droughts, heat waves, tornados, hurricanes, tsunamis, disappearance of glaciers and less snow falls.

About half of Asia's biodiversity is at risk due to climate change which is likely to affect forest expansion and exacerbate threats to biodiversity as a result of land use/cover change and population pressure in most of Asia. Furthermore, marine and coastal ecosystems in Asia are likely to be affected by sea level rise and temperature increases.



According to the Stern Review on the economics of climate change, published in October 2006 and reproduced by the European Parliament, the cost associated in the fight against the climate change is much less than inaction. While reduction of GHG emissions would cost around 1% of global GDP every year, inaction could cost the economy 5% to 20% of global GDP each year. Therefore, Asian governments are encouraged to take measures in line with the Kyoto Protocol to combat global warming.

The Role of Asian Parliaments

The Asian parliaments may adopt the following measures:

- a) Working closely with the Asian governments to generate funds, from developed countries and international financial institutions, for new technologies to combat the climate change,
- b) Adopting a strategy on climate change, particularly in the area of energy and transportation systems, bearing in mind the ultimate goal of achieving the Asian Strategy for Climate Change,
- c) Considering a ban on import of all old and fuel inefficient vehicles,
- d) Removing fossil fuel subsidies,
- e) Promoting the development of alternative fuel and fuel efficient vehicles,
- f) Passing legislations to encourage greater energy efficiency,
- g) Allocating more budget to research and innovation in environment friendly energy technologies,
- h) Promoting adherence to and implementation of the Kyoto Protocol,
- i) Preparing a post-Kyoto instrument which preserves the interests of Asian countries,
- j) Overseeing the government's activities related to climate change and global warming,
- k) Working with other APA Member Parliaments to improve legislations in the field of climate change and to come up with common guidelines to combat global warming.

Planting of Trees

According to UNEP, at the global level, deforestation continues at a disturbing rate of 13 million hectares per year. In Asia, where there was net loss in the 90s, a net gain of forests in the last couple of years occurred primarily due to large scale reforestation in china.

The major causes of deforestation include the expansion of industrial and agricultural needs, population growth, poverty, lack of proper lands and consumer demand.



We cannot save the planet just by planting trees, nevertheless, it can be considered as one unique response to the global climate change because each tree can remove more than a ton of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere over its lifetime. Planting trees preserves the environment, strengthens sustainable development, and develops forests and green cover.

The Billion Tree Campaign was announced on 8 November 2006 at the UN Convention on Climate Change Conference and initiated in January 2007. The objective was to plant at least one billion trees around the world each year. After five months, the pledge campaign surpassed its target of planting one billion trees. Some Asian countries have already started planting trees in large scale.

The proposal for planting billions of trees throughout Asia which was made by the Parliament of the Republic of the Philippines requires financial and technical resources.

In the long run, the tree planting program can support itself financially. The income generated from selling fruits and woods of planted trees as well as the savings associated with the reduction of GHG emissions provide financial resources for the program. However, necessary measures should be taken to provide money to start the program. The governments can give priority to the mass tree-planting program in the budget and seek the financial support of regional and international organizations to this end. The governments can also provide investment opportunities to the private sector so as to encourage it to be part of this endeavor.

Technical support for the mass tree-planting program can be provided by the domestic private sector, other governments and NGOs as well as regional and international organizations.

People, organizations, business and industry, and civil society should be encouraged to be involved in tree-planting programs.

The implementation phase of the program should take due account of different characteristics of each area including its population size, topography, and climate condition.

Efforts should be made to plant indigenous trees and trees that are appropriate to the local environment.

UNEP has a solemn Billion Tree Campaign. The Secretary General intends to communicate with UNEP to seek its advice as to how the Asian parliaments can better promote mass tree-planting program in Asia and oversee the activities of governments in this regard more efficiently.

The Role of Asian Parliaments

The parliaments may adopt the following measures:

- a) Allocating the necessary budget for mass tree-planting program in the country,



- b) Devoting special attention, in the budget, to public education regarding the mass tree-planting program,
- c) Passing legislations to encourage mass tree-planting program,
- d) Overseeing the government's activities related to mass tree-planting program,
- e) Working with other APA Member Parliaments to improve legislations in the field of mass tree-planting program and to exchange experiences in this regard,
- f) Encouraging Asian governments to work more closely with UNEP on different aspects of mass tree-planting program.

The Way Forward

The Sub-Committee has before it a host of environmental issues. It has been asked to submit its report, including its Plan of Action to the Plenary. The Sub-Committee may decide on the following points:

1. Environmental issues are plentiful and diverse. The Sub-Committee may decide to choose one of its three general themes, namely, environmental issues, climate change and large scale tree-planting for further discussions in the next session of the Sub-Committee.
2. Drafting an Asian plan of action for environmental issues is an ambitious and arduous task. The Sub-Committee may discuss the steps needed to be taken by the Asian parliaments to encourage the relevant agencies of Asian countries to come up with an Asian plan of action for environment. The Secretary General is of the view that when discussions referred to in paragraph one above is exhausted, APA will be in a better position to discuss the plan of action.
3. The Sub-Committee may request the Secretary General to report to its next session the results of his communication with UNEP on planting billions of trees throughout Asia.
4. APA may establish contacts with IPU and other parliamentary assemblies in order to exchange views and experiences on environmental issues.
5. The Sub-Committee may discuss possible areas of cooperation between the parliaments and the governments on legislation, allocation of budget and overseeing the activities of governments with regard to environmental issues, global warming and planting billion of trees throughout Asia.
6. The Sub-Committee may endorse the following measures to be taken by the parliaments:
 - i) Working closely with the Asian governments to generate funds, from developed countries and international financial institutions, for new



- technologies to combat the environmental degradation and the climate change,
- ii) Considering a ban on imports of all outdated and polluting technologies and all old and fuel inefficient vehicles,
 - iii) Transferring a proportion of road transport to more environmentally friendly modes of transport,
 - iv) Levying an environmental tax on all unsustainable activities,
 - v) Strengthening environmental aspects of all legislative proposals,
 - vi) Adopting a sustainable development strategy with a view to achieving the Asia Sustainable Development Strategy (ASDS),
 - vii) Adopting a national action plan to achieve yearly energy savings,
 - viii) Phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies in the budget,
 - ix) Devoting special attention, in the budget, to public education and increasing environmental awareness among the general public including in the area of mass tree-planting program,
 - x) Allocating more budget to activities of the government's environmental department, to research and innovation in environment friendly energy technologies and to mass tree-planting program in the country,
 - xi) Overseeing the government's activities related to the environment, climate change and mass tree-planting program, including holding hearings with the participation of officials directly involved in environmental issues,
 - xii) Working with other APA Member Parliaments to improve legislations in the field of sustainable development, particularly on issues related to environment, climate change and mass-tree planting program, and to come up with common guidelines for better protection of the environment in Asia.
 - xiii) Adopting a strategy on climate change, particularly in the area of energy and transportation systems, bearing in mind the ultimate goal of achieving the Asian Strategy for Climate Change,
 - xiv) Removing fossil fuel subsidies,
 - xv) Promoting the development of alternative fuel and fuel efficient vehicles,
 - xvi) Passing legislations to encourage greater energy efficiency and mass tree-planting program,
 - xvii) Promoting adherence to and implementation of the Kyoto Protocol,
 - xviii) Preparing a post-Kyoto instrument which preserves the interests of Asian countries,
 - xix) Encouraging Asian governments to work more closely with UNEP on different aspects of mass tree-planting program.