



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Climate change an economic threat, say experts

Islamabad, Pakistan, 13 January, 2009 (IUCN) – Climatic changes are likely to intensify the environmental stresses that lead to land degradation, shortfalls in food production, rural poverty and urban unrest. This was stated by Dr R.K. Pachauri, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in his keynote speech delivered on Tuesday at a two-day regional conference, “Climate Change: Challenges and Opportunities for South Asia”.

The conference will bring together experts from the South Asia region to share their knowledge and experience of climate change, and to explore measures to combat this potential threat. Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani was the chief guest on the occasion.

The inaugural session was attended by senior politicians and members of government, prominent representatives from the development sector, major donors, eminent scientists, and technical experts from Pakistan and South Asia.

Organised jointly by the Ministry of Environment and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Pakistan, and supported by the UK Department for International Development and the Norwegian Embassy, the conference will highlight the potentially disastrous effects of climate change on developing countries.

Federal Minister for Environment Hameed Ullah Jan Afridi delivered the welcome address. Aban Marker Kabraji, Regional Director, IUCN-Asia, set the context for the conference, explaining why climate change should not be viewed simply as an environmental threat. Climate change concerns specific to the Pakistan context were spelled out by Advisor Science and Technology, and Minister of State for Planning Commission, Dr Ishfaq Ahmad, who said that research on this subject was in a nascent stage in Pakistan. Javed Jabbar, Regional Councillor, IUCN, also spoke on the occasion, pointing out that the poorest members of society are always the ones most affected by the impact of climate change.

Dr Pachauri, in his keynote speech, said that global warming was “unequivocal”. There was no scope for scientific questioning. Describing the effects of climate change in many parts of the world, he went on to explain the impact that such changes are likely to have on a country like Pakistan and on the lives of its people.

Pakistan is today witnessing severe pressure on natural resources and the environment, and climatic changes are likely to exacerbate this trend. Water supply, already a serious concern in many parts of the country, will decline dramatically, affecting food production. Export industries such as fisheries will also be affected, while coastal areas risk being inundated, flooding the homes of millions of people living in low lying areas. The health of millions will also be affected, he pointed out, as diarrhoeal diseases associated with floods and drought become more prevalent. Intensifying rural poverty is likely to increase internal migration as well as migration to other countries. Given the enormity of the impact, Dr Pachauri stressed that adaptation and mitigation measures are critically important.

Although most societies have a long history of adapting to the impacts of weather and climate, Dr Pachauri warned that climate change as we are experiencing it today poses new risks that will require new investments in adaptive responses.

But adaptation alone is not sufficient, he said. Stabilisation and mitigation strategies are also required. Stabilisation can be achieved by turning to renewable energy technologies that are either currently available or expected to be commercialised in coming decades. In this area, Pakistan is ideally placed since there exists substantial potential in this county to develop renewable energy sources. The most promising of

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these, Dr Pachauri noted, are hydropower, solar, wind and biomass.

Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, in his speech, noted that according to a recently published index, Pakistan was ranked 12th on the list of countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The government realises the serious implications of climate change on the economy and on the environment, the Prime Minister said, assuring the audience that climate change was one of the government's top priorities.

Although an insignificant contributor to global carbon emissions, Pakistan will nevertheless work towards further reducing its emissions through energy conservation and improved energy efficiency, tapping renewable sources of energy, promoting alternate energy generation and sustainable transport, working towards sustainable agriculture, reducing deforestation, and improving environmental management in all sectors, the Prime Minister noted. He said that all policies relevant to climate change, developed from here on, will take climate change into consideration, while existing policies will be further streamlined to ensure the integration of climate change concerns.

The conference continued with a technical session where scientists and experts from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka described responses to climate change in their own countries. The second day of