

Welcome Address

by Justice Anwar Zaheer Jamali¹

Honourable Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry;

My Honourable brother judges from the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Honourable Chief Justices from Federal Shariat Court of Pakistan, Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Islamabad High Court and Honourable Judges of all High Courts;

Honourable participants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand;

Honourable members of environmental tribunals and district judiciary;

Honourable Members of various Bar counsel and Bar associations throughout Pakistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir;

Honourable members of the bar, media, environmental organizations;

Participants from different governmental and non-governmental organizations; and

Other distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Assalam-o-Alaikum

In the inaugural session of this South Asian Conference on Environmental Justice, first of all I take the opportunity to welcome all my esteemed guests with the warmth of my heart. The arrangement of this Conference from the platform of the Apex Court of Pakistan has been made possible in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank and the International Union for Conservation of Nature, who have played their due role in holding this Conference. It is really a great honour for me to stand here and welcome you all on behalf of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, our associate organizers and the whole team behind us who has worked tirelessly for the past almost eight months to put this event together. In this context, I also extend our special thanks to the Honourable Chief Justice of Pakistan, Mr. Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry for his visionary approach, which enabled us to witness this event today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Conference is a sequel to other Conferences on environmental issues previously held in many South Asian and SAARC countries, which have made invaluable contribution and impact in bringing about much needed awareness amongst the public of this region about

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the sensitive nature of this issue, and also in the judicial growth and policy making efforts in respect of problems relating to environmental justice.

The main purpose of organizing this Conference is to broaden our vision and perspective of judicial policy making to meet environmental threats posed to this region, particularly, to our own motherland in the wake of an exploding population, trend of unplanned industrialization, an unprecedented urbanization, deforestation, damage to coastal areas and colossal damage to our national resources due to mismanagement and lack of technical knowhow, which is posing overwhelming threats to the natural landscaping beauty of this region and the very existence of our planet.

Dear audience, I am not going to articulate here any alarming statistics of how the environmental degradation is affecting our economy as well as ecosystem nor will I warn you of how rapidly we are approaching an ecological disaster. A simple, but careful study of drastic climatic changes in our region in the last five to eight years, bringing unprecedented destruction in the form of flooding, earthquakes etc., is more than sufficient to give you an idea all about it. There is plethora of information available at the tips of one's finger on where we stand and what we face in terms of environmental challenges, both on micro and macro levels, due to the neglect as well as double standards, particularly, followed by many developed countries as against the under privileged nations; whether it be the dumping of nuclear waste on foreign soil, the hazardous chemical emissions, the concomitant erosion of land area, the depletion of our protective ozone layer or the sewerage or garbage issues in a slum area next door. We all know that at different scales, the problems are one too many to tackle, but at least as a step forward we must join hands to get a grip on them by minimizing the contributing factors, mitigating the damage and adopting environmental friendly and green technologies and processes to clamp further degradation and disaster. So, essentially the purpose of this Conference is not merely the focus on our environmental concerns, but to bring strength for its solutions, to inspire judicial activism and to develop trend of far sightedness in decision making.

Presently, there are numerous national, regional and international laws governing the subject of environmental justice in the form of conventions, treaties, protocols as well as international and domestic legislation of which there can be a long list readily made available. However, as an adjudicator, lawyer and environmentalist our role is not confined to the study or drafting the text of these documents, but to breathe new life into them through their application, implementation, necessary amendments and updating the concept of environmental justice by giving pragmatic judicial interpretation to these laws in the complex factual scenarios and evolving various means of study to resolve these issues through our joint efforts – that is exactly what we are here to brain storm, discuss and develop.

I believe this conference should enable us to devise strategies and result oriented approach towards achieving our targets and maintaining high environmental standards globally, particularly in the SAARC Region. I believe it is imperative at this stage to highlight the instrumental role that these conferences have played in the past in ensuring that noteworthy progress is made towards more refined and environmental friendly world. In this context, instead of going into the results of various conferences held in South East Asian and SAARC countries, here only reference to a recent conference at the national level on the

subject of Environmental Law, jointly held by the Balochistan High Court and the High Court Bar Association will be sufficient, which on its conclusion, by way of publication of a beautiful book has not only provided us with eye-opening instances of our inactions and lapses resulting in environmental degradation in various parts of the country, but at the same time also provided very useful information and suggestions for implementation, to avoid further environmental decay in different fields. I am confident, the significance of this accomplishment would be enhanced today when we will further steer this ship to discover new horizons which will serve to eliminate the ecological decay and reinforce environmental justice in the peculiar geographical complexion of our country and this region. In the words of Bunyan Bryant, Professor at the University of Michigan (QUOTE) “environmental justice is served when people can realize their highest potential” (QUOTE) and today, ladies and gentlemen, we are going to do exactly that.

With that I will take the opportunity to end my speech, but before that, I once again would warmly welcome and wish you all two days of interesting and beneficial programs and also a pleasant, enjoyable and memorable stay at Bhurban.

Thank you very much.

Pakistan Zindabad!