Subregional Office
SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA
ESCAP

SAARC

UN environment programme

Side Event at the 81st Session of the Commission

Building Climate-Resilient Cities: Tackling Air Pollution for a Sustainable Urban Future

Date: 23 April 2025
Time: 14:00 – 15.15 (GMT +7)
Venue: Meeting Room-A, United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC), Bangkok
Format: Hybrid, MS Teams

Background and objectives

South Asia is home to some of the world's fastest-growing cities, yet rapid urbanization has come at a steep environmental cost. Cities across the region grapple with worsening air pollution, extreme heatwaves, and climate-induced vulnerabilities that threaten public health, infrastructure, and economic stability. South Asia's urban population grew by 130 million between 2001 and 2011 and is poised to rise by almost 250 million by 2030[1], the urgency to adopt sustainable and resilient urban solutions has never been greater.

Air pollution, a transboundary challenge, demands regional cooperation. Toxic haze from crop burning, industrial emissions, and vehicular exhaust does not respect borders—impacting health, productivity, and ecosystems across SAARC nations. Meanwhile, rising temperatures and erratic weather events strain cities ill-equipped to adapt. The need for integrated policies, clean energy transitions, and climate-smart infrastructure is critical to safeguard urban futures.

This side event, organized by ESCAP's Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia in collaboration with the SAARC Secretariat and UNEP, will bring together policymakers, experts, and practitioners to explore regional cooperation and innovative solutions for tackling urban air pollution and climate-induced challenges. The discussion will focus on cross-border air pollution, clean energy transitions, and urban adaptation strategies to build sustainable and climate-resilient cities.

Expected Outcomes

- Strengthened regional partnerships to address air pollution and climate resilience in urban areas
- Identification of policy recommendations for integrating air quality management into urban sustainability plans
- Exchange of best practices on urban climate adaptation, emissions reduction, and multi-stakeholder collaboration

Organization: The event will be organized by ESCAP Subregional for South and South-West Asia in collaboration with the SAARC Secretariat and UNEP.

Participation: The event will be attended by SAARC Secretary-General, representatives from ESCAP and SAARC member states, experts, UN agencies and interested member States representatives and partners.

[1] *World Bank, Leveraging Urbanization in South Asia*

The panelists will dwell upon the following questions

1. What are the major sources of urban air pollution in South Asia, and how can regional collaboration mitigate them?
2. How can cities integrate climate adaptation and air quality policies into urban planning?
3. What role can clean energy transitions play in reducing urban emissions, and what financing mechanisms can support them?
4. How can nature-based solutions and technology-driven innovations help build climate-resilient cities?
5. What policy frameworks are needed to promote cross-border cooperation on air pollution management?

Tentative Programme	
***23 April 2025,* 14:00 – 15.15 (GMT +7)**	
14:00 – 14:25	**Opening Remarks:** *Moderator: Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office* • **Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana,** Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP • **H.E. Ambassador. Mr. Md. Golam Sarwar,** Secretary-General, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) • **H.E. Dr. Anisuzzaman Chowdhury**, Special Assistant (State Minister), Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh • **H.E. Mr. Fuwad Thowfeek**, Ambassador of Maldives to the Kingdom of Thailand, Government of the Republic of Maldives • **Mr. Krishna Prasad Dhakal,** Joint Secretary/Head of United Nations, International Organizations and International Law Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal • **Ms. Faiza Haseeb,** Permanent Representative of Pakistan to ESCAP on behalf of **H.E. Mr. Ishaq Dar,** Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan
14:25 – 15:10	**Panel Discussion: Urban Air Pollution and Climate Resilience: Strategies for Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Cities** *Introduction*: **Ms. Dechen Tsering**, Regional Director, UN Environment Programme *Moderator:* **Dr. Mushtaq Ahmed Memon**, Regional Coordinator for Chemicals and Pollution Action UNEP, Asia Pacific Regional Office, Bangkok • **Mr. Sanjay Joshi,** Principal Urban Development Specialist, Water and Urban Development Sector, Asian Development Bank (virtual) • **Dr. Abid Suleri,** Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Pakistan (virtual) • **Ms. Prim Rajasurang Wongkrasaemongkol,** Youth Empowerment in Climate Action Platform, Thailand • **Mr. Anshuman Varma,** Environment and Development Division, ESCAP **Open Discussion and Q&A**
15:10 – 15:15	**Closing remarks** • **Ms. Mikiko Tanaka,** Head, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office