

**Statement of Hon. Naseer Ahamed, Minister of Environment**  
**Made as a video statement under the Agenda item 6: Roundtable 1 of**  
**The 7th Committee on the Environment and Development, UN-ESCAP**  
**29th November 2022, Bangkok, Thailand**

**Hon. Chair,**

**Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,**

I consider it a privilege for me to address the 7th committee of the ESCAP on the theme, **“Protecting our Planet through Regional Cooperation and Solidarity”**.

**“A fundamental cultural change is the only way to Protect our Planet”**

It’s an alarming fact that Asia and the Pacific region are in unsustainable development path.

**We grow rapidly and together We pollute widely**

As you may all know, our region generates more than half of the global greenhouse gas emissions and produce 43 percent of global plastic volume. In addition to this, eight of our rivers contribute to global river-borne plastics in the ocean which are then transported to faraway beaches worldwide.

With the regional chemical production and fertilizer use growing at a rapid rate, several dead zones have also developed in the Bay of Bengal and will continue to do so in the future.

When considering the island of Sri Lanka, air pollution is a concerning issue all over the country. Air pollutants which spread with the help of the North-East monsoon winds from far East to the Kandyan valley in Sri Lanka, makes our sacred city more polluted.

Although, we have allowed our urban centers to grow, poor air quality and high heat levels common to urbanization have not been controlled.

As we are aware, Triple planetary crisis which is at our doorstep is Transboundary in nature.

If I elaborate further;

- For Sri Lanka, Climate change is no longer a phenomenon that will occur in the future, but something that is already happening in front of our very own eyes.
- Loss of biodiversity in Sri Lanka is an immediate cause due to climate change and pollution.

## **Excellencies, distinguished delegates,**

Sri Lanka, apply whole of government and stakeholder approach to mitigate adverse impacts. Key recent actionable policy steps include, updated NDC target of **70% of power generation from renewable resources by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2050**. We decided **No-new-coal plant construction**. Further, the 5th UNEA adopted a Resolution on **sustainable nitrogen management** with Sri Lanka's leadership to reduce nitrogen pollution globally.

However, Sri Lanka has reached a point where **many of the environmental issues that we are facing, cannot be solved alone**.

## **Excellencies,**

The Ministerial declaration includes relevant elements to strengthen partnerships.

I call you for a **Cultural shift** in our region;

- Our cultural wisdom on living in harmony with nature is unique. I therefore call for a **life style change for sustainable production and consumption**.
- Regional victims of air pollution like Sri Lanka are less resourced. I therefore call for a **Regional Air quality monitoring platform** to generate data, and analyze trends for policy making.
- If the region is a top plastic producer, **we are the Solution**. I therefore call to **Reduce the size of the problem** at regional level. Our manufacturers and researchers should together find new means to **Design plastic products to be circular, recirculate plastics in practice and Manage plastic waste**.
- Our oceans can mitigate climate change. I therefore call for **an Alliance for Ocean-based climate mitigation**.
- High intensity of rainfall, floods and droughts make high losses and damages annually. Damages and losses caused by disasters in May 2016 and 2017 in Sri Lanka is estimated at US\$ 660 Mn and US\$ 478 Mn respectively. What are we do for this. We are getting affected and we are there for to something. I therefore call for a strong regional forum on Loss and damage in align with the global fund.
- We are comprised of both the high GHG emitters as well as highly vulnerable countries of climate change. I call for a **Collective call for redouble disbursement of resources for climate action**. The ESCAP should create **enabling environment with the private sector** with Green finance frameworks. In doing so, the **eligibility criteria should not be restricted to economic benchmarks**. The **vulnerability criteria should be equally applicable** to access financial and capacity building assistance.

Finally, it is our duty and responsibility as the Ministers and Senior officials to find structural changes, measure progress, bring impactful policy frameworks and reach consensus on new regional agreements/frameworks to Protect our Planet.

I wish all of you a fruitful deliberation. Thank you!