INAUGURAL SESSION
(10 OCTOBER 2019)

THIRD MEETING OF SAARC MINISTERS OF EDUCATION/HIGHER EDUCATION
Paradise Island, Maldives

STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSAIN B. SIAL, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

Chief Guest, Hon. Foreign Minister of Maldives,
Hon. Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honour and a privilege for me to address the Inaugural Session of the Third Meeting of SAARC Ministers of Education in this beautiful island of the Maldives.

We are greatly honoured by the distinguished presence of Hon. Foreign Minister in our midst this morning as the Chief Guest. We look forward to benefiting from his Inaugural Address.

We wish to gratefully acknowledge the august presence of Hon. Ministers of Education and Heads of Delegation from the Member States. Their participation in this Ministerial Meeting is a testimony to the importance that the Member States attach to regional cooperation in education.

I wish to thank the esteemed Government of Maldives for hosting this important Ministerial Meeting. I also wish to thank the Government for warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to us. The arrangements made for this Ministerial Meeting are excellent.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we are aware, one of the objectives of SAARC is to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials. In pursuance of this objective, as early as in December 1988, at the Fourth SAARC Summit in Islamabad, our leaders decided to include education as one of the priority areas of regional cooperation.

Accordingly, regional collaboration in education is being pursued through mechanisms such as the meetings of SAARC Education Ministers and Heads of University Grants Commissions or Equivalent Bodies, including through the SAARC Chairs, Fellowships and Scholarships Scheme. In addition, the South Asian University provides quality education to our students at Masters, MPhil and PhD levels.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

During successive SAARC Summits, our leaders have emphasized the need to effectively pursue regional collaboration in education in order to harness the human capital of our region, which has about a quarter of the global population.
During the Eighteenth SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in November 2014, our leaders expressed their resolve to eliminating illiteracy from the region in line with the global goal of education for all and ensuring quality education in all institutions by reforming curricula, teaching methods and evaluation systems, adequately supported by physical, technical and other facilities. They agreed to promote regional cooperation in the field of vocational education and training. They also directed their Education Ministers to develop a Regional Strategy for Enhancing the Quality of Education in order to raise the standards of South Asian educational institutions in order to better serve the youth in the region.

We look forward to benefitting from the vision of Hon. Ministers for carrying forward the directives of our leaders.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The New Delhi Declaration on Education adopted by the Second Meeting of SAARC Ministers of Education in October 2014 brings to the fore crucial areas for both strategic policy interventions as well as for actions by the Member States in achieving the goal of Education for All.

In pursuance of the directive contained in the New Delhi Declaration on Education, a comprehensive document, *Education 2030: SAARC Framework for Action* was prepared in 2016. This Document puts together a number of measures to achieve the targets set out in the New Delhi Declaration on Education as well as in realizing the aims of SDG 4, which is to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.” This Ministerial Meeting may wish to underscore effective implementation of the SAARC Framework for Action.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to thank the Senior Officials for their diligence for facilitating work of this Ministerial Meeting.

We are confident that the Malé Declaration on Education to be adopted by this Ministerial Meeting will prove instrumental in realizing the universal goal of Education for All.

I wish the Ministerial Meeting enormous success.

Thank you.

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