INAUGURAL SESSION

(19 FEBRUARY 2018)

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN, 19-21 FEBRUARY 2018

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

Excellency the Federal Minister for Human Rights,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address the Inaugural Session of the International Conference on Human Rights.

I wish to thank the Federal Ministry of Human Rights of Pakistan for inviting me to this Conference and for very warm welcome and generous hospitality. I also congratulate the Ministry on the excellent arrangements made for the Conference.

The convening of this Conference, coinciding with the Seventieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is indeed opportune. The theme of the Conference, ‘*Owning Human Rights for a Better World*’ is also relevant as we strive to attain [Sustainable Development Goals](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics) (SDGs), conducive to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Distinguished Delegates,

The primary objectives of SAARC are to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia, improve their quality of life, and provide them the opportunity to live in dignity and realize their full potentials. The promotion and protection of human rights, therefore, is at the centrestage of the SAARC process.

SAARC’s unequivocal commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and taking all necessary steps to achieve this objective stems from the directives of our leaders. During SAARC Summits, our leaders have underscored that civil and political rights, on the one hand, and economic and social rights, on the other, are inter-dependent and of equal importance. They have also underlined the need to strengthen respective national institutions in South Asia to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this context, the inauguration of the National Institute on Human Rights at this Session assumes enormous significance.

As human rights, issues related to children have also figured prominently on SAARC’s agenda. Our leaders have resolved to accord the highest priority to the welfare and wellbeing of children in national development planning, especially in the spheres of education and health.

All of us would agree that investing in children is so vital for our future. At the same time, sustained efforts are needed to address the formidable challenges faced by children, especially the girl child, not only to free them from all types of deprivation, including poverty and hunger; discrimination; violence; and sufferings arising out of child trafficking, child labour and child marriage, but also to make them both partners and beneficiaries of South Asian progress and development.

The issues of women too have continued to receive focused attention of our leaders. They have time and again reiterated the need to bring women fully into the mainstream of development, on the basis of gender equality, with a particular focus on women’s economic empowerment and skills development, while addressing key health issues and violence against women. They have also called for strengthened regional collaboration for eliminating all forms of discrimination and abuse against women in general and widows, in particular, in order to guarantee their rights to live in the society in a dignified manner.

I am glad to state that these directives of our leaders have led to the signing of the regional instruments like “SAARC Social Charter”; “Regional Convention on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution”; and “SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements on the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia”.

Distinguished Delegates,

Climate Change is not only a global phenomenon; it is a global challenge. Indeed, the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation are becoming truly intense, varied and frequent, leading to massive destruction of life, property and livelihood, and displacement of human population, coupled with the post-disaster consequences like scarcity of food, water and shelter, adversely impinging upon the human rights – the right to life and the right to live.

I am confident that this International Conference will focus on achievable and sustainable measures not only to promote human rights, and welfare of children and women, but also how to mitigate the impact of climate change.

I wish the Conference great success.

Thank you.

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