

**statement to the press, Dhaka, July 6<sup>th</sup> 2008**

Position of Equity and Justice Working Group Bangladesh (equitybd) on SAARC Ministerial Conference on Climate Change, Dhaka, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2008. Dhaka Reporters Unity dated 6<sup>th</sup> July 2008, 11 am

**Specific guideline for the mitigation of climate crisis is absent in declaration of SAARC ministerial meet; political and people's participation is imperative in preparing climate change action plan.**

**(A) Within the present structural limitations of SAARC, implementation of such a commitment is questionable.**

The preparatory ministerial meeting of SAARC on climate change held in Dhaka during 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> July declared a five point action plan which to be finalized in the upcoming 15th SAARC summit to be held in Colombo during 27<sup>th</sup> July to 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2008.

Equitybd appreciate these initiatives and also express worries about the structural weakness of SAARC which would be a major hurdle in the implementation of such a declaration and action plan. This is also to note that SAARC is the only regional intergovernmental body that does not recognize any role or does not give any space to the civil society. Moreover if concern parties are not agreed then there would no scope for discussion on any agenda. If any citizen of the countries gives any application in the secretariat, secretariat does not oblige to forward those the member countries.

So taking all these in gamut, it is difficult to mitigate the problem like climate change, especially for Bangladesh, while the problem is so acute and it is imperatively require the participation of people represented by political leaders and also by civil societies. There are some limitations among governments that they can not say all the things, those could be expressed by civil society and political leaders. To develop public opinion in other than Bangladesh, role of civil society is imperative. We hope government of Bangladesh will understand the necessity and play a role in this regard.

**(B) Important issues have been left out; those should be discussed in SAARC summit.**

Equitybd believes that there are some important issues have not been discussed in ministerial meetings and these issues should be discussed in Colombo meetings; these are;

**(1) SAARC food bank must ensure food security of the people of SAARC.**

The resolution has already been adopted. Nepal already has adopted the resolution other countries have not yet. SAARC has to adopt how the food needs of the people of SAARC region will be met by surplus foods from the SAARC region. There should not be any profit tendency by any SAARC country in respect of food trading while it is to meet the demand of another SAARC country. The principle should be maintained that “Food in SAARC region should be for the hungry people of the SAARC region first.”

**(2) Visa free region to offset the climate refugee problem.**

According to the World Bank report one third of Bangladesh land especially its coastal area will be submerged making 22 million people environmental refugee. It is natural that for very economic and livelihood reasons these people want to go in neighboring countries. As products and capital of the neighboring countries are coming in Bangladesh, as trade deficit is increasing day by day, and as the neighboring advanced developing country is also one of the highest emitters of green house gases, so this is our natural right to demand visa free movement of natural person especially movement of climate refugees to other SAARC countries and also to countries responsible for global warming and climate change.

Australia has already given such immigration scope to the population of Papua Neugini; which is under the threat of sea level rise. Environmental refugees of Bangladesh also deserve such immigration to the high carbon emitting countries within the region and also to the other continent.

**(3) Need ecological debt assessment to claim compensation.**

The damages which have been done by carbon emissions by developed and advanced developing countries should be considered as their ecological debt to the poor countries. Meanwhile the Srilankan minister has raised the proposal of assessing ecological debt in our countries. We strongly believe that SAARC should take initiatives to assess the ecological damages in our countries, the figures should be considered to claim as compensation from the high carbon emitting countries. Such assessment is an imperative need for the negotiation and also important to build public opinion.

**(4) Regional rivers for regional people, country in upper riparian should not take advantage.**

Most of the rivers in SAARC are common; those rivers are the source of life and livelihood of the people of the region. The regulation of water flows through construction of dam and embankment by the in country upper riparian are causing water scarcity during dry session and salinity ingression in the winter, especially in Bangladesh. But these issues could not be raised as SAARC constitution does not allow discussion of bi-lateral issues. This constitution limitation is irritating to some countries to some extent. There should be a demand for the revision of SAARC constitution, so that such a multilateral and bilateral issues could be discussed in this regional forum.

**(5) SAARC Development Fund should be turned as SAARC Development Bank.**

If countries take loans from International Financial Institutions (IFIs) like World Bank, IMF and ADB then countries has to follow the neo liberal policies, especially the blanket import liberalization and commercialization of public services, especially water, education, electricity etc. These cause more pauperization in the countries, in fact IFI create spaces or market for the multi national companies (MNC) of developed countries. There are also a number of projects where IFIs have invested which has caused ecological damages and there are also ecological damages has also directly done by MNCs especially in Bangladesh. So SAARC should take initiative to turn the SAARC development fund as SAARC Regional Bank as an alternative to the IFIs.

**(C) Pre consultation of SAARC common positioning on important issues in international level is fundamental.**

Equitybd appreciates the declaration that SAARC countries will take common position in respect of issues related to climate change in different international forum. But the countries must do consultations prior to important international events and declare it to the public. There are some important recent issues in this regard as follows;

**(6) No climate fund under the World Bank, the bank and its neo liberal policies is also responsible for climate disaster.**

At present World Bank is developing separate climate fund with the auspicious of G8 countries which is a breach to the commitment has given by those counties in UNFCCC Bali conference. There was commitment to develop such a fund under the framework of UNFCCC. Civil society and developing countries are afraid that such a funding under World Bank will be utilized for more liberalization of the market, more exploitation of ecological resources and thereby more ecological degradation and resource drainage to the developed countries. It should be noted that World Bank still has the biggest investment in the extractions of fossil fuels which are resulting more emission and global warming. Even the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, has criticized the role of World Bank and advised them to be an Environmental Bank. He also criticized the conditionality of the bank. We demand SAARC countries should go for critical engagement with IFIs in this regard.

**(7) Bangladesh must take side with LDCs (least developed countries); building reciprocal confidence among LDCs is a fundamental.**

Bangladesh should not forget that in the past Bangladesh got problem to earn the confidence of the LDCs as it has tried to maintain so called balance and good relation with G 77 and G 90. Now Bangladesh again in the position of coordinating the interest of LDCs, so Bangladesh should keep the interest and confidence of LDCs in all above.

**(8) We must demand DF/QF (duty free and quota free) access of products of the LDCs in Doha round.**

There was a general consensus in the WTO Hong Kong Ministerial to give DF / QF to LDC products, although from USA it is 97 %. The access should be from developed countries and also from advance developing countries. As USA is obstinately rigid in 97 %, there is a threat of including popular products of LDCs (e.g., garments of Bangladesh) in barring 3 %. SAARC needs to decide whether in common they support such a DF/QF access of LDC products. Please note that Bangladesh and Nepal is only two LDCs in SAARC.

**(9) CDM technology must be transferred to LDC free of cost.**

There is a line of commitment in respect of south south cooperation in the ministerial declaration. This is not clear. SAARC must take position on transferring CDM (clean development mechanism) technology free of cost to the LDCs, as they are worse sufferer of the climate change. We are afraid that in the name of CDM, MNCs will start new business and exploitation. Developed countries especially USA already started demanding duty free access of such technologies to the developing countries in Doha round negotiation.

**(10) No collateral of natural resources to the MNCs in the name of regional cooperation.**

From the experiences it shows the correlation that, country who has given access to the MNC for extraction of its natural resource; it has not been able to develop or not been able to invest sufficient resources for poverty alleviation. We have seen there are several international companies like Asia Energy and company like TATA is negotiating with Bangladesh to get access in extraction of coal and other resources or to get low cost supply of these resources for their investment. SAARC should take position against this; in no way country's natural resource would be the collateral to any MNC although it is from the region. Country should develop their own capacity to invest in such an extraction industries.

It should be noted that, equitybd has conducted such a campaign along with three international campaign organization, like Jubilee South – Asia Pacific Movement on Debt and Development, LDC Watch and SAAPE, South Asia Association for Poverty Eradication. Equitybd demands compensation and reparation in relation to ecological debt and also demands full debt cancellation for Bangladesh. Equitybd will do the same campaign in the People SAARC to be held in Colombo during 18 – 20<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

**Equity and Justice Working Group Bangladesh (equitybd)**  
House 9/4, Road 2, Shaymoli, Dhaka 1207  
Phone: +88 02 8125181, + 88 02 8154673, Fax: + 88 02 9129395  
Website: [www.equitybd.org](http://www.equitybd.org), E mail: info@equitybd.org