



Stop Climate Change! Save Bangladesh!



Memorandum

To: Mr. Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary General,
E-mail: secretary-general@commonwealth.int
From: Bangladeshis and their international friends, especially from Australia
Date: October 26, 2011
Subject: Demand for urgent action to stop climate change and save Bangladesh
CC: All Heads of Governments of Commonwealth Nations.

As part of the Bangladesh Global Climate Change Action Day (BGCCAD), resident and non-resident Bangladeshis and their international friends have gathered in rallies across the world on September 18, 2009, including the rally at Ralph Bunche Park, near the United Nations Headquarters in New York and rallies in Canberra, Sydney, Tokyo, Kitakyushu, Toronto, London, and Dhaka (on September 19, 2009). Many more rallies have been organized before and after those dates, where they have made submissions. These rallies have been organized by *Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN)* based outside Bangladesh and *Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA)* based in Bangladesh. We would like to make the following appeal to the Heads of Governments of Commonwealth Nations through your honor.

The people of Bangladesh and their international friends note that

Bangladesh is not responsible for causing climate change: According to the UNDP Human Development Report of 2007 (p. 312), Bangladesh accounted for only 0.1 percent of the total global GHG emission in 2004, with a per capita emission of 0.3 tCO₂, which is only 1.5 percent of that of the United States. Bangladesh's share in the cumulative GHG emissions since the industrial revolution is close to zero percent. According to Climate Analysis Indicators Tool (CAIT) Version 6.0 of World Resources Institute, Bangladesh's share in the world total cumulative emissions during 1950-2000 was 0.01 percent.

Bangladesh will be the worst victim of climate change: A low-lying, deltaic country of only about 144,000 square kilometers, most of Bangladesh is below an elevation of 10 meter above the sea level. According to geological surveys, a rise of sea level by 1 meter implies submergence of about 15 percent of Bangladesh's landmass. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Synthesis Report of 2007 (p. 47) notes that due to global warming, the sea level has risen at an alarming average rate of 3.1 mm per year during 1993-2003 and may rise in future by about 7 meters as a result of complete elimination of the Greenland Ice sheet. This would imply the submergence of about 70 percent of Bangladesh, a densely populated country with a current population of

about 150 million, projected to grow to 222 million by 2050, according to UN Population Projections. The sea level rise, as predicted above, will make about 150 million people “climate refugees,” destabilizing Bangladesh, South Asia, and the world as a whole. Even the part of Bangladesh that will escape direct submergence will be affected by deep salinity intrusion, destroying vegetation and agriculture. Receding Himalayan glaciers will render Bangladesh’s rivers dry during the winter, while increased precipitation in summer will aggravate floods. Increase in the frequency and scope of extreme weather events, another consequence of climate change, will devastate Bangladesh, a country known for its vulnerability to cyclones and tidal bores. Spread of known and new diseases will take a much heavier toll in Bangladesh, a tropical country prone to water- and vector-borne diseases. There are few countries in the world for which climate change poses such an existential threat to such a vast number of people as in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has become the epicenter of the climate change upheaval that may soon overwhelm the earth and the human civilization.

Climate Change has already started to affect Bangladesh: While for many climate change is a threat of the future, the people of Bangladesh are already bearing the brunt of it. She has already seen rising sea level encroach her shoreline and push salinity inside. *Sidr, Nargis, Bizli, Aila*, are just a few recent cyclones that have hit Bangladesh’s coast killing thousands of people and wrecking havoc to crops and assets. Summers have become extremely hot and rainfall has become erratic. Crop yields are getting adversely affected. Exotic diseases are spreading. Climate change related stresses are causing thousands of additional deaths in Bangladesh. Even if there were no further increase, the already high level of GHG concentration in the atmosphere will bring about significant climate changes the adverse effects of which will fall prominently on Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is already burdened by the development challenge: More than two hundred years of colonial and semi colonial exploitation has left Bangladesh impoverished with little economic surplus. With a per capita income of only 2,053 PPP US \$ in 2005 (UNDP 2007, p. 231), Bangladesh is one of the Least Developed Countries (LDC), according to the UN classification, having 41.3 percent of the population below “\$1 a day” poverty line, and 84 percent below the “\$2 a day” poverty line. Bangladesh’s per capita energy consumption is one of the lowest in the world, standing in 2004 at only 154 kilowatt-hours (kwh), as compared to 14,240 kwh of the United States. Only 32 percent of the population has electricity, so that 96.2 million people still remain to get this basic infrastructural facility (see UNDP 2007, p. 304 for these data). Bangladesh therefore requires a huge expansion of electricity generation capacity in order to ensure a minimum standard of living for her people. In view of the huge development and energy challenge, and in view of her very limited financial, technological, human, and institutional capability, it is extremely disconcerting for Bangladesh to face the additional climate challenge.

Developed countries have to take the responsibility: Developed countries, among which are countries that once subjected Bangladesh and many developing countries to colonial rule and skimmed away their economic surplus, have also robbed these countries of the carbon space necessary for them to grow. Developed countries therefore have to take the

responsibility for mitigating climate change and for creating the conditions for developing countries like Bangladesh to achieve fast economic growth, raise their energy capacity, close the per capita income gap, and adapt to climate change. The UNFCCC principle of “common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities” is the recognition of the qualitatively different situation of the developed and developing countries with respect to both culpability of and capacity to remedy the menace of climate change. The UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol rightly condition developing countries’ mitigation efforts on financial and technological support provided by developed countries and enjoin the latter to provide necessary help to developing countries for adaptation.

Unsatisfactory performance of developed countries so far: Unfortunately, the performance of developed countries with respect to mitigation so far has been disappointing. Whereas the Kyoto Protocol postulated a reduction of emissions by 5 pct relative to the 1990 level by 2012, data collected by UNFCCC show that if Economies in Transition (EIT) are excluded, the actual emission of Annex I countries has actually increased by 11 percent over 1990-2004. Developed countries have also failed to provide adequate financial and technological help to developing countries to support their mitigation and adaptation activities, even though they were obliged to do so under UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol. The Global Environment Facility (GEF), established in 1991 under UNFCCC to encourage transfer of climate friendly technologies to developing countries, has allocated only \$3 billion in the past 17 years. Similarly, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), the Kyoto Protocol’s mechanism to promote mitigation activities in developing countries, has approved projects with a total value of \$6 billion only between 2004 and 2007. Furthermore, 90 percent of these projects have been concentrated in only five countries, none of which are from the LDC group. The poor performance of developed countries with regard to both mitigation within their borders and providing adaptation and mitigation help to developing countries has created the impression among the latter that developed countries are in effect shifting the climate change burden on to the shoulders of developing countries. This impression in turn had led to a lack of trust between developed and developing countries in confronting the climate change threat.

Safer mitigation goals are necessary: In discussing mitigation, developed countries have so far generally put forward stabilization goals in the range of 450 to 550 ppm atmospheric GHG concentration level. However, studies have shown this range to be unsafe. For example, according to the Stern Review (2006, p. 195, Box 8.1), there is 78 percent probability that the equilibrium temperature will exceed 2⁰C, relative to the pre-industrial level and considered to be tolerable. Given such a high probability, and the fact that changes triggered and damages done may be irreversible, stabilization goals in the range of 450 to 550 ppm are not acceptable, and a much lower stabilization goal is necessary. Developed countries need to adopt and implement sincerely GHG reduction targets that are commensurate to such lower stabilization goal.

Funds meant for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries need to be placed with the UNFCCC: There are efforts on the part of some quarters to place the fund meant

for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries in the hands of the World Bank and allow it to micro manage the use of the fund by getting involved in the selection and implementation of individual projects. Yet, the World Bank model of project-aid has proved to be a failure in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the developing world, apart from its being incompatible with the practice of repayment of loan from general budget instead of from earnings of the projects financed. The experience has also shown that general budgetary support is the most effective method of providing development loans to a country and is also compatible with the principle of repayment of loans from general budget. Moreover, the climate change assistance cannot be loans and should rather be viewed as compensation for the difficulties that developed countries have created for developing countries by causing climate change. The fund meant for mitigation and adaptation can therefore be better placed under UNFCCC, which is a more democratic institution, operating on the basis of the “one country, one vote” principle, rather than the principle of voting in accordance to capital contributed, as practiced in the World Bank, a principle that marginalizes Bangladesh and other developing countries in the decision making process. Adoption of budgetary support as the method of channeling fund can relieve UNFCCC of the necessity of elaborate infrastructure and human resources that are otherwise necessary for disbursement of fund following the project-aid approach. The aforementioned fact that there should be no issue of repayment makes the task of fund management easier. The fund will be provided in exchange for mitigation and adaptation obligations, for which national governments will be responsible, and the fulfillment of which UNFCCC will have to monitor anyway, as part of its general role with regard to the Agreement/Protocol signed. Also the generation of the fund will be, to a great extent, linked to the obligations that developed countries undertake in the agreements reached under UNFCCC. The UNFCCC is therefore more suitable to oversee both the generation and disbursement sides of climate change related assistance provided to developing countries. Putting all climate change related assistance funds in the hands of UNFCCC will also be a better option than its fragmentation into numerous bilateral and multilateral initiatives.

Trade opportunities are needed for adaptation: One of the best ways in which Bangladesh and other developing countries can adapt is to reduce their dependence on climate dependent economic activities and diversify into sectors that are not that affected by changes in climate. However, Bangladesh and other developing countries cannot diversify their economy without necessary trade opportunities.

Climate assistance can set the direction of Bangladesh’s energy path: In meeting its growing energy demand, Bangladesh now faces two options. One is to exploit the coal deposits of her northwestern part, and thus get locked into a high emission energy path with other associated environmental and human costs. The other is to make use of the country’s abundant solar power, the exploitation of which is however, as of now, more expensive and face limitations of scale. Financial and technological assistance from developed countries can play an important role in helping Bangladesh to move more decisively for the solar option.

Climate assistance can help Bangladesh take the most crucial adaptation measure: Silt carried by the rivers is one of the main protections of Bangladesh against inundation caused by the rising sea level. Hence, an important adaptation necessity for Bangladesh is revitalization of her river system, stabilization of river flow across the seasons, and protection from tidal bore. Bangladesh cannot undertake this mammoth task without adequate international financial and technological assistance and without regional cooperation, in particular, cooperation from India.

United Nations is playing the right role: The United Nations has taken the leading role in mobilizing the world community in confronting the climate change challenge. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) set up by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in 1988 has done excellent work in gathering and disseminating scientific findings regarding climate change. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreed on 1992 has provided the arena for coordinated inter-governmental efforts regarding mitigation and adaptation. The 1997 Kyoto Protocol, despite its limitations and insufficient implementation, has been a significant achievement of UNFCCC, and the agreements at the 15th Conference of Parties held in Copenhagen are significant.

The Commonwealth can play important role: Many nations under the Commonwealth are developing and a number of these nations including Bangladesh would be among the worst victims of Climate Change and Sea Level Rise impacts. It is of utmost importance that this forum strongly advocates on behalf of the suffering nations.

The Bangladeshis and its international friends are demanding the following:

Adopt 350 ppm as the stabilization goal: The world community, engaged in inter-governmental negotiations under the UNFCCC, adopts at the upcoming Copenhagen 15th Conference of Parties (COP) the safer stabilization goal of 350 ppm.

Developed countries undertake the main role in achieving the 350 ppm target: Developed countries take the lead and demonstrate through immediate and deep emission reductions their sincerity toward bringing down emission levels commensurate with the 350 ppm goal.

Developed countries provide necessary climate change related financial and technological assistance: Developed countries provide Bangladesh and other climate change frontier developing countries necessary financial and technological assistance both for adaptation and for choosing development paths that generate less emission, without however slowing down the pace of their economic growth. Developed countries facilitate development and diffusion of technologies that are helpful for adaptation and mitigation purposes in Bangladesh and other developing countries.

Developed countries provide necessary trade opportunities: Developed countries ensure free access to their markets for Bangladesh and other LDCs so that these countries can export their products and diversify their economy and increase its resilience to adverse effects of climate change.

Provide immigration rights to climate refugees: Developed countries will provide immigration rights to “climate refugees” from Bangladesh and other climate change frontier countries whose livelihood will be threatened by climate change.

Climate assistance funds be increased and placed under UNFCCC and provided as budgetary support grants: Developed countries place their climate change related financial assistance for developing countries in a common fund set up under the UNFCCC, which in turn channels the fund directly to national governments of climate challenged developing countries in the form of budgetary support, leaving it up to the recipient national governments decide on how best to use the money in the light of respective domestic situation and needs. The funds provided to Bangladesh and other climate change frontier countries should be grants, not loans, and be treated as compensation for the damage done to their prospects due to climate change.

Developed countries provide necessary technological support: In particular, developed countries should provide Bangladesh necessary technological support so that she can follow the solar-path toward energy development instead of resorting to the coal-path.

Assistance for conservation and rejuvenation of the river system: Developed countries should provide necessary financial and technological assistance for the preservation of the Bangladesh river system, stabilization of flow across seasons, and protection of the coast from tidal bores and rising sea level. International community should help Bangladesh secure necessary cooperation from India with regard to preservation of the natural flow of water of the rivers shared by India and Bangladesh.

Support be provided for the World center for adaptation research be established in Bangladesh: The UNFCCC has helped establish in Bangladesh the world center for adaptation to climate change in order to promote research on adaptation and disseminate across the world the best practice of adaptation gathered from the experience of Bangladesh and other climate change frontier countries. It is important that further assistance is provided by the Commonwealth.

Support for the Commonwealth effort

The Bangladeshis and its international friends, especially from Australia, support the holding of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2011 in Perth, Australia. This forum wishes all the very best for a safe, successful and sustainable holding of the Meeting.

On behalf of BEN Australia Chapter and BAPA-

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