

SPECIAL REMARKS BY SECRETARY GENERAL

Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Environment and Climate Change

12 October 2023, Paro, Bhutan

Mrs. Tashi Pem, Offtg. Secretary, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Royal Government of Bhutan;

Dr. Shahidul Rashid, Director, International Food Policy Research Institute, South-Asia;

Heads of Delegation, Distinguished Delegates & Friends from our BIMSTEC Countries.

1. Good Morning and let me once more welcome you to Paro and to the Second BIMSTEC Joint Working Group Meeting on Environment and Climate Change.
2. I am personally very happy that this meeting is taking place “in person” where our delegates not only get the opportunity to come this small country (which is fairly considered a good place to visit) – but, our delegates also have the opportunity of sharing experiences and getting to know each other personally.
3. I would like to thank the Royal Government of Bhutan, in particular the Department of Environment & Climate Change for hosting this important meeting. And of course, I must also express my deep appreciation to our partner IFPRI for their most generous support in providing training to our BIMSTEC Delegates as well as supporting and organizing environmental conferences & the second BIMSTEC Joint Working Group Meeting “in person” in Bhutan.

Distinguished Delegates,

4. As you are aware, the 5th BIMSTEC Summit held in Sri Lanka on 30th March last year, was a historic moment in the BIMSTEC journey - as the Leaders of our Member States adopted the BIMSTEC Charter.
5. While adopting the charter, the summit also rationalized and reconstituted its sectors of cooperation - with each Member State taking the responsibility to lead a particular sector. Accordingly, Bhutan was designated as the Lead Member State for BIMSTEC Cooperation in Environment & Climate Change.
6. As I said during the inaugural session, some BIMSTEC Sectors of Cooperation like Security, Trade & Connectivity have reached an advanced stage. Their working mechanisms are all well established and some of their working groups have had more than 20 meetings already.
7. Unfortunately, Environment and Climate Change in the past few years of BIMSTEC Cooperation have not got enough focus and thus have not been able to show good progress.
8. However, after the 5th BIMSTEC Summit when sectors of cooperation were reconstituted, Environment & Climate Change has gained importance and has been recognized as “one”

of the seven core sectors BIMSTEC cooperation. Since then, Bhutan has taken the mantle to lead this important sector.

9. The Secretariat and other member states are “very hopeful and confident” that this area of cooperation under the leadership of Bhutan – who is known for environment and carbon neutrality, will take forward BIMSTEC’s Environment & Climate Change agenda to a new height and a new momentum.

Distinguished Delegates,

10. As you must be aware, the First Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Environment & Climate Change was held virtually on 06th of December, 2022. The meeting deliberated extensively on; the draft Concept Note on Areas of Cooperation and the draft Plan of Action on Environment & Climate Change.
11. However, the two draft documents could not be concluded during the first Joint Working Group Meeting and in fact they proposed for a Second Working Group meeting to finalize: the Draft Concept Note of Environment and Climate Change, and finalize the Plan of Action, on BIMSTEC Environment & Climate Change.
12. As directed by the First Meeting, both the documents were revised by Bhutan and the Secretariat with incorporation of views and comments received from the Member States. Therefore, the main purpose of the Second BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Environment & Climate Change is, to review the comments received from the Member States & Finalize these two important documents.
13. Preceding this meeting we had 3 days program on Environment & Climate Change where economists, environment experts & professionals participated. As you may be aware, the main idea of this 3 days conference was to get their thoughts and views and hopefully incorporate and enrich our BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Environment & Climate Change.
14. Director Tshewang, under **Agenda Item 04-Update on the Environment and Climate Change Sector** will present a summary of pertinent issues that mooted during the 3 days conference for discussion and incorporation before finalizing the Plan of action.
15. In conclusion, I would like to say that I am personally very impressed with a very good start of environment & climate change cooperation. We have lot of inputs from many experts enriching the plan of action.
16. I am happy to inform that besides IFPRI many other international agencies are taking interest in taking forward our BIMSTEC Plan of action on Environment – The World Bank, IFAD and ADB.
17. I am also very happy and confident that this area of cooperation - Environment & Climate change is under the right leadership –Bhutan. Bhutan as we all know is a champion of environment.
18. Bhutan by constitution maintains minimum 60 percent forest cover at any given time, it is currently carbon negative country and we hope Bhutan will influence & spread this example to the rest of the BIMSTEC Countries.

Thank you!!!