

NEPAL  
Country Statement

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Mr. President, Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

I bring to you the fond greetings of the Prime Minister and the people of Nepal.

On behalf of our delegation, I express my sincere gratitude to the people and the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar for their warm hospitality. I also thank the Asia-Pacific Water Forum for the proficient arrangements made for this conference.

Mr. President,

Nepal is the home of the Himalayas whose glaciers -- and snowfields -- store the largest amount of frozen water outside of the polar regions. They feed almost a dozen river systems and sustain the livelihoods of nearly 2 billion people.

The mountains and the rivers that flow through them are our lifeline and identity. In this century, we want to utilize and govern this tremendous global resource for our common prosperity.

In my statement today, I wish to emphasize three themes of concern to Nepal. *First*, how do we realize the right to water? *Second*, how shall we harness the potentials of water for clean energy and irrigation while minimizing the loss of life and property from disasters? *Third*, how can we better manage our transboundary commons?

#### PART I

The right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, accessible and affordable water. The SDGs reflect access to potable water and sanitation as a core development priority. Nepal's historic constitution issued in 2015 also recognizes this as a fundamental right.

Our challenge now is to translate these aspirations into tangible outcomes through legislative guarantees and an institutional architecture for functioning systems of water supply that last.

Over the past 25 years, we nearly doubled the proportion of households with access to improved sources of drinking water from 46 percent in 1990 to 84 percent in 2015. Our goal is to achieve universal coverage of safe drinking water and to ensure that over 90 percent of households have access to piped water at a fair price well ahead of 2030.

Clean water is a right, but its instrumentality is equally compelling. Nepal's average life expectancy jumped from about 54 in the mid-1990s to over 70 now. This leap was possible because fewer people are dying from water-borne diseases. We are now taking an integrated approach to water, sanitation and hygiene, with a new Sector Development Plan coinciding with the SDGs.

Going forward, we must leverage private and community-based financing, and build the competencies of municipalities to run utilities well. We need to solve the problem of the last mile. And even where facilities exist, the challenge of quality and reliability remain formidable.

We believe that it is these basic services that connect the ordinary citizen to the state every day. We know that public trust in democracies are built painstakingly over time – step by step and drop by drop.

## PART II

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Nepal has the potential to meet all its energy needs through clean hydropower. Over the next two years, we are poised to double the existing capacity of about 1000 megawatts of electricity, followed by a pipeline of projects that can deliver more than 10,000 megawatts in a decade.

Cheap, reliable and clean energy will help improve competitiveness of Nepali enterprises. But it can also help displace dirty sources of fuel in the rest of the sub-continent through cross-border trade in energy.

We aim to leverage clean energy to attract private investment, boost tourism and create jobs. With large-scale irrigation schemes, we hope to water nearly 2 million hectares of arable land throughout the year, unleashing productivity in agriculture.

Carried along by ambitious but realistic policy decisions in energy, agriculture and tourism, Nepal hopes to become an exemplary “low-carbon economy.” Yet, we might face a paradox in the future: scarcity of water when and where we need it, and excess when we don’t.

Just four months ago, excessive rainfall within a compressed calendar resulted in severe flash floods across the plains of Nepal, with damages estimated at over 500 million US dollars.

Recurring disasters have magnified Nepal’s vulnerability, and they underscore the need for better plans for more resilient recoveries.

Going forward, we will put in place an optimal flood management approach that strengthens peoples’ coping capacities. We need a resilience framework that strengthens early warning systems, invests in preparedness and response, and diversifies people’s livelihoods and risk transfer schemes.

### PART III

Distinguished delegates,

High altitude places in the Himalayas are warming faster than most other places on earth, and they are facing rapid decline in snow and ice.

Climate change in the Himalayas is driven not just by greenhouse gas-driven global warming, but also by severe regional air pollution originating on the nearby Indo-Gangetic plains -- one of the largest sources of black carbon world-wide. While the region has a large untapped potential for the generation of clean energy, the stream flow needed for hydropower is itself at risk from climate change.

The reduction of pollution and the release of hazardous chemicals, enhancement of water efficiency, and the restoration of water-related ecosystems in the mountains, rivers, forests and lakes now need to become a global imperative.

Integrated Water Resource Management calls for national coordination and international collaboration. The basin of direct concern to us is the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system. It injects the third largest volume of freshwater into the world's oceans, exceeded only by the Amazon and the Congo river systems.

Yet, this river basin has been identified as being among the top four in terms of risks exhibited by a high environmental and human stress, nutrient pollution, changes in population density, potentially leading to conflict and competition.

Despite projected increases in water availability, withdrawals will amplify as a result of urbanization. We no longer have a choice, but to cooperate. The shared benefits from hydropower, flood control, irrigation, navigation, drinking water and a host of ancillary economic activities are just too valuable to ignore. We need to introspect on why progress has been slow.

Here, regional initiatives, facilitated by organizations like SAARC and BIMSTEC would be welcome.

We commend the research, advocacy and the convening roles of platforms like the Asia-Pacific Water Forum and organizations like the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) based in Kathmandu. We hope that the network of researchers who work on the common challenges of land, air and water receive adequate funding and that their policy impact grows.

Mr. President,

Nepal is a good global citizen. We abide by the landmark international agreements struck over

the past three years on disaster risk reduction, financing for development, climate change and the SDGs.

From Sendai to Paris and Addis Ababa to New York, we exhort the international community, especially countries in a position to do much more, to lead on problems with cross-national implications.

As a landlocked, least developed country, Nepal expects to work with all our partners, at home and abroad, by augmenting technical and financial assistance, and building synergies.

On this day, I also pledge to you that we will do much more on our part, building on our indigenous innovations in community-led conservation and driven by our shared angst about the ecological perils in sight.

Let me conclude by expressing our appreciation again for the opportunity to be part of this summit at a momentous time of hope and change here in Myanmar and across Asia.

Thank you and Namaste.