

Speech of Smt. Margaret Alva,

H.E. the Governor of Uttarakhand

"First Sustainable Mountain Development Summit–2011"

Uttarakhand Academy of Administration, Nainital

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Mr. Stefan Helming, Country Director of GIZ–India for Indo–German cooperation, Dr. Andreas Schild, Dr. R.S. Tolia, Chairperson, Central Himalayan Environment Association (CHEA), Administrators, Policy Makers, Civil Society Representatives, Scholars and Academicians from all the concerned eleven Himalayan States of India, Distinguished Guests, Representatives of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

For ages, the Himalayas have fascinated sages, seers, poets and philosophers, as also scientists and environmentalists, from all over the world. The great Sanskrit poet and dramatist Kalidasa had described this mountain system thus: "*There is a mountain in the north, pervaded by Divinity named Himalaya, the king of all mountains; Stretching from east to west it is located on the earth as a measuring rod.*"

The Himalayas are the longest and the highest range of mountains in the world. They are bestowed with thick forests full of rich and varied diversity of flora and fauna, archaeological monuments and religious shrines, unique river systems; a variety of mineral deposits, besides unparalleled scenic splendour. The Indian Himalayan Region, which occupies a strategic position along the entire northern boundary of the country, and administratively covers 10 states in their entirety and two states partially, is of wide ranging ecological and socio-economic significance.

The Himalayan ranges stand guard over the Indian subcontinent; they are responsible for bringing rains to many regions lying to the south, they also prevent the cold and dry winds of Central Asia from reaching India. Besides innumerable products, the Indian Himalayan Region generates a plethora of services, not only for Himalayan inhabitants but also for people living well beyond its boundaries. The range, with its large area under permanent snow cover and glaciers, forms a unique water reservoir that feeds several important perennial rivers and streams, that carry water to the parched plains of northern India.

With its vast green cover, the Indian Himalayan Region, also acts as a giant carbon 'sink', and forms a considerably large part of the identified Himalayan Biodiversity global hotspot.

Although the grandeur of the Himalayas conveys an impression of immutability, it actually has an inbuilt ecological fragility, and is susceptible to rapid structural collapse. These geologically young mountains, fall under the most vulnerable category, and are prone to floods, landslides, and other ecological disturbances. The region is

facing environmental problems on account of various factors including the stress caused by human activities, such as tourism, construction of dams, and roads, mining and other developmental projects; over-exploitation of aromatic and medicinal plants for commercial purposes, destruction of habitats; deforestation, lopping and over-grazing. Pollution, indiscriminate use of pesticides, and illegal trade and trafficking of wild animals in the commercial market, have also had an adverse impact on the environment and ecology of the region.

The glaciers termed Asia's "water towers" that melt into the Himalayan rivers, whose melt-water supplies drinking and irrigation water to billions of people, are under threat due to rising carbon dioxide levels and are shrinking. Rising levels of ecological degradation have created several other problems, that have an adverse impact not only on the ecology, social and economic structure of this mountain range, but also affect the ecology, hydrology and socio-economy of the lower plains areas.

It is an accepted fact that the socio-economic status or the level of prosperity of the people is directly linked to the state of the environment in a region, implying thereby, that a conducive environment, always means a better life. This makes the environmental issues involving the Indian Himalayan Region, of critical importance to all of us.

This First Sustainable Mountain Development Summit organised by the Central Himalayan Environment Association, under its Indian Mountain Initiative programme, is therefore a welcome step and I am very happy to be here to share my concerns and hopes with you.

I have taken note of the four themes identified for the Summit. One of them is the most hotly-debated subject of Hydropower Projects in this Mountain Region, whose potential is enormous. Hydro power ensures burning less fossil fuel, which reduces the production of gases that cause air pollution, acid rain, and the greenhouse effect. It is a renewable source of energy, which has many intrinsic advantages, compared to thermal or nuclear power. Of our national hydro potential of over 1,50,000 MW, only about 23 per cent has either been harnessed or is under exploitation. In addition, the estimated small hydro potential is about 6,782 MW.

Hydropower projects are of late being viewed with concern because adequate attention is not paid to environmental/conservation issues. It is claimed that construction of big dams adversely affects the hydrology, physical, biological and social environment, besides impacting livelihoods, culture of indigenous people and ethnic minorities. Any developmental activity would certainly have some negative impact.

Planners need to take into account the links between relocation and income generation activities. A review of the resettlement portfolio has found that while displaced families with good access to productive resources, were able to recreate and sometimes improve their lives, others had lost their survival base and livelihoods. A major problem in resettlement management is the lack of an appropriate institutional framework at both the agency and field levels to implement rehabilitation programmes. It is important to ensure that appropriate agencies are identified for this at the time of project preparation itself, and build necessary linkages with the affected communities.

The debate on nuclear energy as a source of power is now in the public domain all over the world. Advanced countries are reviewing their nuclear power programmes in view of the disasters that Japan has faced recently and other parts of the world earlier. Hydro power is still the safest, cleanest and the most acceptable. Small dams, check-dams; wind and water mills; revival of natural springs, traditional village wells and tanks; need to be launched as a people's movement in the hill areas. A programme for restoring forest areas damaged by dams, could provide employment to the local people through out the year, by way of home nurseries, organic leaf compost manure production, and tree planting.

There is also a need to shift to advanced turbine technology which will preserve the ability to generate electricity while maintaining the downstream dissolved oxygen, water quality standards and reducing fish mortality. Unfortunately, religion and tradition clouds our thinking even in the face of scientific advances.

The other themes of the Summit covering the mountain Regions such as "Adaptation Measures under Climate Change scenario", "Rural Tourism and "Community Forestry" are inter-related as much as they are inter-dependent.

Under the National Action Plan for Climate Change, our National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem has been formulated. The Himalayan States have made efforts for its implementation but a lot more needs to be done. Exchange of information with the South Asian countries, and those sharing the Himalayan ecology, is required. There is need to establish an observational and monitoring network for the region to assess the health of the ecosystem. Issues such as urbanization, tourism, water security, energy, forest management, infrastructure, as also the pivotal role of women in their management, are highly pertinent.

Biodiversity is a big asset for tourism development and fundamental to its long-term growth. Community Based Tourism or Rural Tourism is a new initiative that promises benefits for both conservation and development.

In Uttarakhand, Community Based Tourism initiatives of the last decade such as Mountain Shepherds, Village Ways and Mahaseer Conservancy have attracted both national and international attention. These projects have created additional and supplementary jobs, increased incomes, developed local infrastructure and enhanced investment. Improvement of communication, guiding and other skills and exposure to outsiders has brought attitudinal change and encouraged entrepreneurship as well as environmental sensitivity. This is the land that gave birth to the "Chipko" movement. But we seem to have lost its spirit. There is need to rejuvenate "Chipko" as a massive environmental movement and a symbol of community participation.

Uttarakhand boasts of six National parks and large areas of unique green forests. The State government is constantly demanding and receiving Green Bonus from the Centre for their protection and maintenance. There is need for proper monitoring of these green funds to ensure that they are utilized for the purposes they are meant for. Those directly affected by the enforcement of green area regulations, must receive a due share of these funds. Man-animal conflict is growing, as each of them feels the other is encroaching into their territory. This is a serious problem, particularly when animals

enter human habitats, in search of water and food. Elephant corridors need to be protected from development encroachments. Poachers and animal hunters are playing havoc due to insufficient manpower provided by way of forest guards and anti-poaching squads. Lack of equipment, fast vehicles, modern detection systems and total failure of the authorities to enforce the law, add to the problem. These issues can no longer be ignored.

The States in the Indian Himalayan Region must try to build on the success of the past by taking advantage of Government of India's infrastructure development schemes and tourism projects planned with the support of external agencies such as GTZ, ADB, and JICA.

I am happy to note that the Indian Mountain Initiative aims at providing a "Himalayan Discussion Forum" for sharing the Indian Himalayan experiences and concerns on a continuous basis.

I am sure that this Summit will serve as a first step for resolving key issues and increasing the effectiveness of research and development activities. A Plan of Action must result from this consultation. This document must collate key inputs of the Summit in the form of best practices for better governance and management of the Himalayan ecosystem. It must be made available in the public domain, inviting comments and inputs from State governments, domestic and international institutions, civil society, local communities and other stakeholders. The Plan of Action must provide the basis for the adoption of new approaches and practices. I wish you success in your endeavour. May it be said of you some day that never in the history of the Himalayan people was so much owed by so many to so few...

Thank you,

JAI HIND!