

**REMARKS**  
**BY**  
**H.E. LYONPO CHENKYAB DORJI,**  
**SAARC SECRETARY GENERAL**

The Honorable President of India,  
Her Excellency the Minister of State of Women and Child Development of India,  
Their Excellencies the Ministers from the South Asian Countries,  
Regional Programme Director, UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is indeed a great privilege and honor for me to address the Inaugural Session of the **Sixth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference, “Commemorating Beijing,”** being held in this historic city of New Delhi.
2. We are specially honoured this morning by the gracious presence of the Hon. President of India. Her Excellency’s presence not only signifies the importance of this meeting, but also demonstrates the personal commitment attached by the Hon. President to the cause of women. I am confident that Her Excellency’s Inaugural Address will inspire us and set the tone of deliberations of this three-day Conference.
3. I join our gracious host in welcoming the distinguished Ministers from SAARC Member States to this Conference. Indeed, Their Excellencies’ presence at this Conference bears testimony to the seriousness with which Member States intend to pursue the important goal of empowering women. I also wish to take this opportunity to commend UNIFEM and the concerned agencies of the Government of India for the warm welcome and the excellent arrangements made for this Conference.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

4. The **Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995** was an important milestone in our common endeavour to address the challenges faced by women. It brought women’s issues to the forefront of the international agenda and developed the **Beijing Platform for Action**. Since then, two sessions, namely, the Beijing +5 and the Beijing +10 have been held to take stock of the progress made since the 1995 Conference.
5. This Conference today is yet another important occasion to commemorate the historic Beijing Conference and to provide further impetus to the various goals and targets we have set out for the women of our region.
6. This Conference also assumes special significance for SAARC, as we will be launching the **SAARC Gender Database** today. The SAARC Gender Database is

the outcome of the collective efforts of SAARC and UNIFEM over the last three years.

7. I would like to place on record our sincere appreciation to UNIFEM, particularly Ms. Chandani Joshi and her able team for their support and commitment in developing the SAARC Gender Database.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

8. Since its inception, SAARC has attached high importance to regional cooperation on issues relating to women. So far, four Ministerial Conferences on Women's Issues have been held. Likewise, the successive SAARC Summits have always underscored the need to pay focused attention to women's issues.
9. More importantly, the **SAARC Social Charter** adopted by the Twelfth Summit held in Islamabad in January 2004 provides a regional dimension of action including a specific role for SAARC, beyond national plans of action. It also embodies a broad range of targets, including the empowerment of women, to be achieved across the region. Following the Thirteenth Summit directive, two meetings of the **Heads of National Coordination Committees** were held in Islamabad and in New Delhi in 2006 and 2007 respectively to review progress in the implementation of the provisions of the Charter.
10. SAARC adopted two regional Conventions in 2002, namely, the **Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution**, and the **Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia**. A **Regional Task Force**, established to review the progress made in the implementation of the two Conventions, met in New Delhi in July 2007.
11. In the recent past, the Twenty-ninth Session of the Council of Ministers held in New Delhi in December 2007, called for the early operationalization of the **SAARC Development Fund**. The SAARC Development Fund has a **Social Window**, for which a corpus of USD 300 million has already been mobilized as an initial contribution. At the same time, pursuant to the Fourteenth Summit directive, a number of projects have been proposed for funding under the Social Window to address the needs of women.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

12. SAARC and UNIFEM have been engaged in close cooperation since the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in December 2001. Last year, SAARC and UNIFEM developed a booklet entitled, "**Gender Initiatives in SAARC: A Primer.**" The most tangible outcome of our collaboration has been the development of the **SAARC Gender Database**.

13. I am confident that with the enhanced cooperation between our two organizations, the Member States of SAARC will continue to make steady progress towards realizing the goals of Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and the SAARC Development Goals. Given our firm commitment and resolve, I have no doubt that the women and children of our region will be able to live in dignity and realize their full potential.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

14. Before I conclude, I once again like to express our profound gratitude to the Hon. President of India for so kindly gracing this important occasion.

15. I wish this Conference every success.

I thank you.