

**ADDRESS OF WELCOME  
BY  
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ON  
WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2011  
At  
“MASHHADI HALL” of  
*Pakistan Engineering Congress***

**Distinguished Delegates, Members of Pakistan Engineering Congress,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen!**

**Assalam-o-Alaikum!**

I take this opportunity on behalf of Pakistan Engineering Congress in general and on my own in particular, to welcome you all, to this gathering, for observing “World Environment Day” on the theme of

**“Forests – Nature at Your Service”**

I in particular extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for finding some time to attend this event, which is a thought of global significance, yet of much more relevance in the context of Pakistan.

It is indeed my profound privilege to speak before this distinguished assembly of engineers, environmentalists as well as the stakeholders concerning with the protection and conservation of the environment.

**Ladies and Gentlemen!**

From several years, one of the main concerns of humankind has been the ecological system and its protection. However, it is heartrending that at the same time we, humans, the major part of this ecosystem, have almost failed to guard and preserve our natural environment, as it is.

Numerous programs have been set worldwide to overcome such problems, of which one with the support of the United Nations is the Environment Protection and Conservation Development Programme in Pakistan which draws its

inspiration from Stockholm Convention 1972. An Environment Protection Ordinance was enacted in 1983 as a starting followed by National Conservation Strategy (NCS) in 1992, culminating in 1997 with enforcement of Pakistan Environment Protection Act specifying the National Environment Quality Control Standards as a Bench Mark.

In 2001, the Government of Pakistan formulated the “**National Action Plan**” to arrest the ever increasing degradation of environment mainly due to man made errors of commission. However, its objectives have remained very sad to point out far cry due to individual and institutional apathy.

**Ladies and Gentlemen!**

The **Allah Tabarak wa Ta’ala**, in numerous verses in the Holy Quran signifies about the crucial role played by “**Forests**” in the socio-economic life of mankind.

***“It is He Who sends down (rain) drinking water and from which (grow) trees among which you graze cattle” (Surah Al-Nahl)***

***“He grows thereby crops, olives, palms, grapes and every kind of fruit for you; surely in this is a sign for people who ponder” (Surah Al-Nahl)***

Here it would not be out of place to quote a couplet of eminent American poet “**Robert Frost**”

***“The woods are lovely, dark and deep  
But I have promises to keep  
And miles to go before I sleep  
And miles to go before I sleep”***

Much earlier Moghul Period Poet Laureate “**Ibrahim Zouq**” wrote:

***“Only commitment to travel is needed thousands of trees are there  
to give you company”***

It shows that the Sub-continent was awash with Forests in Moghul Period.

**Ladies and Gentlemen!**

Man has been cutting down forests indiscriminately. Over the past 50 years, about half of the world’s original forest cover has been lost, the most significant cause being the unsystematic use of this resource by human beings. But now it

is good to know that today the trend is not only to save the forests but also to create the new ones.

Forests should not be considered merely as a direct source of wealth rather they should be considered in relation to our national economies / geographies, the balance in our ecosystems, and even much farther by looking at them beyond our narrow human, not to mention an urban perspective.

Forests serve many purposes. They hold together the soil and prevent or minimize soil erosion. The oxygen in the air is replenished by forests and plankton in the sea. Trees and plants, during photosynthesis, absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. It is for this reason that the scientists today fear that if forests are destroyed indiscriminately there will be an increase in carbon dioxide and eventually the sun's rays will become hotter, the polar caps will melt and the ocean level rise and submerge much of our lands. Forests also provide habitats to diverse animal species and form the source of livelihood for many different human settlements. Hundreds of industries also depend on forests, for example, paper industry, plywood industry, Sports goods industry, paint, varnish, rubber goods, match sticks and many others.

And, probably the most significant is that the forests maintain the balance of our natural ecosystems. The forests keep up the balance between the animal and the plant life and preserve the wilds like lions, tigers, panthers etc. These animals depend for their food on animals like deer, antelopes, stags and other animals. In turn these animals live on plants. Similarly some birds feed on smaller birds that live on insects and plants. Thus the forests keep up a balance in nature. No plant or animal goes out of existence and no plant or animal overgrows in number than that required by the nature, but only if, the forests balance is not altered.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

Now with the good comprehension of the issue, the governments all over the world are endeavoring to conserve forests. Some countries around the world are now planting trees faster than they are being cut. Also, trees are being planted to restock woodland areas and to create forests in some countries where timber is scarce. In addition, communities and individuals are helping to save the forests. We also plant millions of saplings but sadly few survive due to lack of protection and watering.

For us too, it would hence be an essentiality to look into the issue effectively. Not only we need to check all the activities which are detrimental to our existing forests but side by side our endeavors to sustain and improve our forest cover

are much important. Knowing that our economy is an agrarian one, we in no way can take ourselves in a position to compromise any further in this respect. Our considered and jointed efforts are thus must to prohibit the losses of forests, as well as all what is associated. Not to over-emphasize, our waters, our dams, our agriculture, our economy, our climate, and thus the most desired one, i.e. our upright sustenance. Let us just prevent the first thing, i.e. deforestation to trigger, so that the rest may automatically be prevented.

### **Scale of Deforestation**

- Deforestation wiped-out about 90% of original forests in West Africa. In Central Africa too it is accelerating. Also 77.22% of West Africa's moist forests have been lost.
- In Nigeria 81% of its old growth forests have been lost in the last 15 years.
- In Ethiopia deforestation loss is 98% due to growing population agriculture, livestock and fuel wood. In the period 1990-2005, alone, the loss is 14% (i.e. 2100 Km<sup>2</sup>).
- In Russia 12 million Km<sup>2</sup> of forests have been lost (2000 Km<sup>2</sup>) per year.
- In Tropics alone 3.5 million Km<sup>2</sup> forests have disappeared totally and 5.0 million Km<sup>2</sup> have been intentionally degraded.
- In Iceland 25% of area was under forests. However, 95% of it consisting of forests and wood lands has been lost.
- Brazil – Deforestation is alarming due to expansion of croplands, cultivation of Soybean for edible oil. In 2008, the decrease in forest area was 69%. It has been estimated that about 60% of Amazon forests will be wiped-out or severely damaged by 2030 due to illegal logging (80% of the logging is illegal).
- In our own country Pakistan, the position is dismal. Only 3% of the landmass is under forests against minimum benchmark of 25%. The position is fast worsening due to illegal logging by timber mafia, cutting of trees for use as fuel wood and illegal un-checked logging. Even the mangrove-forests that work as a check on land erosion and immensely contribute to marine culture are not being spared. The land mafia is destroying these forests for selling fuel wood, reclaiming the land for commercial purposes. It is resulting in degrading and unbalancing of Bio-diversity as well as snatching livelihood of coastal people. What is alarming

is that no serious thinking and no planning is on the anvil to undertake reforestation on a massive scale to

- Check the menace of flooding.
- Erosion of soil and the consequent desertification.
  
- To check the increase in greenhouse emissions of gases
  
- To earn cash credits under REDD programme (Reducing Emissions Deforestation and Degradation).
  
- Degradation of eco-system/Bio-diversity

It is evident from the above stated position that utter consumerism; commercialism has driven the human race upon a course of self-destruction. The un-checked use of fossil fuels, the massive deforestation for new settlements for the expanding population, the land required for growing edible oil plants and the large scale cutting of trees by the Housing Barons and timber mafia, have adversely affected the Bio-diversity and Eco-system. It is resulting in unprecedented increase in global temperatures and un-timely rains during a small period, melting of glaciers, and flash floods.

**Recommendations:**

1. Proper planning for massive plantation of trees on the lines in China where 35 billion saplings are being planted in 4500 KM greenbelt.
  
2. Proper plan of earmarking land for plantation of trees for
  - (i) Production of timber and (ii) Conservation as done in Malaysia where 57% has been allocated for production and 43% for conservation of forests.
  
3. Mangrove forests are a source of livelihood for the people of coastal areas, a source of cheap fuel wood, fodder for the livestock, a barrier for intrusion of Sea water and must be preserved at any cost. However, the position is out of control and the Timber and Land mafia is destroying it and unbalancing the eco-system.
  
4. It should be made mandatory to grow trees on road sides, Railway tracks, Canals etc.

5. Forest reserves be created on all un-utilized Govt. Lands and these forests (like Changa Manga) must be converted into multi-purpose projects and source of vegetable supply, poultry and wood in a planned way. This would also help in poverty alleviation.
6. The Numberdar of each village should be made liable to Pay tax, if the area is below a benchmark of trees.
7. Pakistan Horticulture Authority (PHA) is doing a good job in plantation of trees in Lahore. Now PHA has been established in Faisalabad. All Cities and towns should have such like institutions. However, the focus should be on plantation of long life trees of hard wood.
8. Special attention needs to be given to growing medicinal plants for expansion of pharmaceutical industries and to cut imports of herbs.

In the end, I thank you all for participating in the Seminar and for your patient hearing.

**Pakistan Paindabad**