

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Kitakyushu Initiative Seminar on Urban Air Quality Management

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Bangkok

Opening Statement by Mr. Ravi Sawhney Director, Environment and Sustainable Development Division

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the Kitakyushu Initiative Seminar on Urban Air Quality Management. The importance of this Seminar can be gauged from the fact that air quality in the Asian cities is among the poorest in the world with smoke particles and dust being twice the world average. The main sources of urban air pollution are industrial and manufacturing activities and the ever-increasing fleet of vehicles. The number of motor vehicles has already trebled or even quadrupled over the past decade or so in many cities of the region and it has seriously elevated oxides of nitrogen and lead concentrations. For example, in Delhi motor vehicles had been contributing as much as 70 percent of the total emission of nitrous oxide as well as a large amount of ambient lead, till some strict remedial measures were introduced.

As you would well appreciate, deteriorating urban air quality also had economic impacts due to increased mortality and illness, the degradation caused to crops and property as well as its adverse impact on tourism. One estimate shows that in Bangkok, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, the annual cost from suspended particulate matter and lead is as high as 10 percent of the city's income.

The air quality issue therefore ranks very high along with solid waste and sewage management under the Kitakyushu Initiative. As you are well aware, the Kitakyushu Initiative targets the achievement of measurable progress in the improvement of environment in major cities in Asia and the Pacific, mainly through local efforts. Building capacity of local governments is therefore the fundamental aim of the Kitakyushu Initiative which is being pursued through the promotion of technical and economic as well as regulatory and participatory approaches. We have been assisting in the development of pilot projects for testing and dissemination of good practices, holding training workshops and thematic seminars and facilitating the exchange of information and experiences among the network member cities.

This Seminar is third in the series of seminars that have been held since 2002, following the first on solid waste management and the second on public-private partnership. The Seminar which has been organized to provide a forum for open discussion to assess the problems and capabilities of local governments in addressing urban air quality issues, will cover three main aspects:

The first relates to an assessment of the existing situation, which inter-alia, includes the status of air quality in cities, major pollution sources and the impact of pollution. The second aspect relates to the policy response and management capacity of local governments, in particular the measures adopted for enforcement of regulations and involvement of stakeholders. The third aspect relates to identification of measures that could be adopted in the future to improve the role and capacity of local governments for effective air quality management including good practices which could be adopted or replicated effectively.

I am glad to note that besides the representatives of cities many international organizations are also represented here. Information on the experiences and future plans of your cities and organizations will be extremely useful as a basis for the exchange of ideas and information on local initiatives related to urban air quality as well as in making meaningful recommendations for follow up actions and coordination of future activities on urban air quality management in the region.

I should like to emphasize the importance of coordination of activities especially as in recent years several initiatives have been launched in the region on air quality management. Among these are the Air Pollution in the Mega-cities of Asia Project (APMA), the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities (CAI-Asia), the Urban Air Quality Management Initiative (URBAIR) and the Air Assessment Model for Acid Deposition in Asia (RAINS-ASIA). Indeed, each of these is unique in their objectives, activities and characteristics but they do have a common objective to improve the urban air quality. Hence, there is great scope and potential to exploit synergies and develop mechanisms for coordination among them so that scarce resources available in the region could be utilized more effectively. As you would have noted, one of the agenda items covers this aspect. I hope that it will receive your due attention and consideration.

In concluding, I would like to thank the Government of Japan for the generous financial support extended to the Kitakyushu Initiative activities as well as the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies for cooperating with us in the organisation of this Seminar. I would also like to acknowledge the technical support extended by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. I am sure that this gathering of experts representing a cross-section of cities in the region armed with first-hand knowledge and experience in air quality management, would ensure a fruitful discussion and outcome of this Seminar. I wish you every success in your deliberations and look forward to your recommendations.

Thank you for your attention.