

**5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of World Water Forum of Journalists &  
The 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of Asia-Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists (APFEJ)  
Reaching Copenhagen Climate Summit and Beyond: Role of Media**

**Speech of the Dutch Ambassador: H.E. A.J.A.J.M.G.Hennekens**

Honourable Chief Guest Dr Hasan Mahmud, Minister of Environment

Honourable Special Guests Dr Mihir Kanti Majumder and His Excellency Einar Hebogard Jensen

Mr Quamrul Islam Chowdhury, Chairman of the Asia-Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists and Secretary General of the World Water Forum for Journalists

Distinguished guest and participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organisers for giving me the opportunity to address this august assembly of journalists during the opening of the fifth meeting of the World Water Forum for Journalists here in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The Netherlands and Bangladesh have been working together in the field of water management for over thirty years. Bangladesh and The Netherlands share many of the same opportunities, problems and challenges that are created by the presence of rivers and a large coastal zone. Water provides opportunities; this is why The Netherlands and Bangladesh are among the most densely populated countries in the world. However, it also provides challenges. These challenges are compounded by the effects of climate change.

To adapt to the long-term changes of climate change, proper water management is probably the single most important issue for both our countries. Over the years both our countries have developed methods to manage water and to protect our valuable land against erosion, flooding and salinity intrusion.

As my colleagues will explain in a later session today; the Dutch approach to water management is based on local water boards that have existed for over six hundred years. The local community and landowners were dependent on each other for maintaining the system of waterworks. The fact that when a single individual did not cooperate, all other individuals suffered, led to the creation of a society in which working together became essential. This laid the basis for the Dutch version of a democratic society, which is based on cooperation and finding shared solutions to common problems.

Over the years, Bangladesh developed a similar local water management process, called Participatory Water Management. Through this process, local Water Management Organisations are created with the aim of working together with the Bangladesh Water Development Board and other government organisations to ensure proper water management at the local level. The experience in Bangladesh is that these Water Management Organisations function very well on a local level and through them the prosperity of the people in the areas under their management has increased. However, if the government wants to replicate this experience at the national level they should be supported by a strong water governance structure and institutes.

Effective water management starts with a long term vision. Because of the national importance, this vision must be shared by all political parties and stakeholders.

- Implementation of the vision requires strong water organisations at national and regional level as well as a proper governance structure to support them.

- It also requires cooperation and coordination between stakeholders but above all different Ministries working together for a common goal. For instance, the priority of the present government of Bangladesh is to ensure food security. This means secure food production which is closely linked to water management: in order to get food security, there has to be proper water management. Better irrigation, drainage and flood control can enhance food production by 20 to 30 percent, even in the medium term.
- Water management is expensive and it requires a proper budget to be able to implement new water engineering works. However, most of all, it requires enough funding to maintain investments that have already been made. Recent analyses of the water sector in Bangladesh indicate that over the years not enough funding has been made available for proper operation and management of existing structures. In recent years this has improved but there is room for more improvement in this area, which is of critical importance over the longer term. As is the whole of planning for resources as part of the long term vision.

One of the questions that many people ask is: “Can Bangladesh be saved from drowning?” If we have to believe Al Gore and “The Inconvenient Truth”, the only way we can protect Bangladesh is if we build a wall around it. Well, the wall is already there, it is called the coastal embankment. Bangladesh can indeed be saved however it will need targeted investments in water management and proper maintenance of structures already in place.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of this congress is ‘Reaching the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit: Role of the Media’. In large meetings like the Copenhagen Summit, the media play an important role.

Because of its global impact, all countries stand to benefit from a successful conclusion of this summit. My government believes that:

- We should adopt a target of 50% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 relative to 1990.
- Developed countries need to continue to take the lead in reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. However, the more advanced developing countries must also address their increase in these emissions by reducing the emission intensity as part of their economic development model, in line with the general principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” and with financial and technological support from developed countries.
- All countries need to adapt to climate change and should integrate adaptation into policy, strategic and budgetary decision-making at all levels with the aim of making people, economic systems and ecosystems more resilient to the effects of climate change.
- National governments are responsible for formulating adaptation strategies in cooperation with local governments, the private sector and societal organizations.
- Water, biodiversity and ecosystems are important cross-cutting themes in adaptation strategies and are key factors for determining the impact of climate change and the mitigation measures taken in many other sectors.

The role of the media is not only to educate people regarding the effects of climate change, bring out stories of people affected by climate change but also to report on the effectiveness of the mitigation measures and to hold governments accountable for their promises and actions. In this respect, using the term “climate change” in the media bears a certain risk. Although the effects of climate change are already visible and undeniable true, journalists must remain vigilant and keep on questioning the motives of persons blaming a certain event solely on climate change. The recent past has shown that already too often climate change is blamed for events which are essentially failures of governments in the management of natural resources. Climate change will compound recurring such as droughts and floods, occurring as a result of deforestation; or declining of habitats, which themselves are the result of over exploitation of natural resources. Journalists should not fall in the trap of governments blaming events on climate change to deflect their responsibilities for proper management of their natural resources.

On the other hand, journalists should hold governments and the electorate accountable for taking actions to prepare for known changes that are a result of climate change. Planning for the effects of climate change requires again a long-term vision and commitment. In The Netherlands we have addressed this issue by creating a 'Delta Commission' which advised the government on the steps that need to be taken over the coming hundred years in order to adapt to climate change.

Can Bangladesh be saved from the effects of climate change? Yes, it can! But it will require a change in governance, a lot of work, efficient investments and a watchful eye from journalists to ensure that the electorate is well informed and governments take the required steps to adapt to the effects of climate change and stick to their promises.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.