STATEMENT AT THE 17TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE APPCED

“CLIMATE CHANGE, ITS IMPACT ON IRAN’S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – AND THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS”

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and

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• Ladies and gentleman,

• Today I have two simple messages.

• The first is to add my voice to the growing chorus arguing that climate change is THE greatest collective challenge facing humankind – EVER.

• It is certainly THE greatest human security threat facing Iran.

• The second is to share with you some simple and straightforward ideas on what you – as Parliamentarians – can do to help counter this danger in the Asia-Pacific region.

1. CLIMATE CHANGE AND IRAN

• First, the danger which climate change poses to humankind.

• For we need to turn this into the greatest opportunity for common progress towards sustainable development.

• We can delay it no longer. All our hopes for eradicating poverty and achieving both the Millennium Development Goals – and the future Sustainable Development Goals – will rest on tackling this climate change challenge now, and into the future.

• The science is crystal clear. Human activities are the dominant cause of climate change on our planet. We cannot blame nature. Across the world we have to mitigate these impacts and we have to adapt.

• And the same thing applies to us here in Iran.

• Said simply, Iran will face a hotter – drier – future.

• Like many countries which are rich in natural resources, Iran has used a development approach where we have done 2 things:
  o We have overtaxed our non-renewable resources
And we have underinvested in our renewable ones

- This has produced a result where the environment can no longer be simply considered “just another item” on the national development agenda.

- So I would like to talk about the 5 key challenges which – in the one year that I have been privileged to serve Iran – I have come to understand to be the main threats.
  - The first is **water**.
  - The second is **deforestation and desertification**.
  - The third is the inefficient use of **renewable energy**.
  - The fourth area is **pollution of our air and our water**. In this category we also include the sand and dust storm – most of which blow from our neighbours to the west.
  - The last problem is the loss of our **biodiversity**.

- I could talk at length about all five of these dangers, for they worry me greatly. But I will focus only on the first, **water**, because it is arguably the most important.

- And although I know that the distinguished audience in this room comes from all across Asia and the Pacific, it is principally to the people of Iran that I address the following remarks.

- As I have said, based on climate change projections, Iran – and indeed much of the Middle East – will face a hotter and drier future. We are already seeing this, both in terms of the reduced amount of water available, and the higher and steadily increasing ambient temperatures across Iran.

- Everyone in this country and many outside of it, know about the desperate situation in Lake Uromiyeh – which is the most emblematic example of the problem.

- But how many citizens of Iran are aware of the desperate situation facing the inhabitants of the Hamouns in Sistan?
• How many citizens of Iran are familiar with the problems faced by the hugely spiritually important city of Mashhad – which is facing a rapidly-declining water table in the Kashafrud basin? The drying up of the Harirud in Afghanistan. And the Doosti Dam which is refreshed by the Harirud flowing westwards from Afghanistan.

• Should we be worried about the competition over the water that feeds the two cities of Isfahan or Yazd? Should we be worried about the increased salinity of water in the agricultural fields around Shiraz which is a direct result of over-exploiting the aquifers?

• Or even right here in Tehran where there are concerns that rationing water may be just around the corner. High-consuming citizens have already been served with notices by the authorities to temper their overconsumption.

• For we are at the mercy of the dangerous interplay between supply and demand. Climate change, resulting in a drop in rainfall, plus the overpumping of our aquifers will result in reduced supply.

• At the same time demand is also rising. On current projection trends, the population of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the year 2025 is likely to reach 90 million. At this rate of growth, we will need an additional 30 million cubic metres of water.

• Driven by population increases in the past several decades, the evidence of per capita water availability is going in the opposite direction.
  o In the year 1956, the per capita water available in Iran was 7000 cubic metres.
  o In 2007, the figure dropped to 1900 cubic metres per person.
  o Today the figure is somewhere between 1300 and 1500.
  o Once it crosses 1300 we are into the zone of what hydrologists call “water stress”.
  o Also, once we cross the figure of 1000 – which is where estimates put us in the year 2020 – we are into “water scarcity”.

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• Fixing the water problem with diminishing supply and increasing demand will be an immense challenge.

• But solutions exist.
  o Simple things like increasing the level of participation of the community and finding solutions to manage water is one example.
  o Improving water use efficiency and reducing evaporation is another.
  o Establishing a fair price for water is a third.
  o We also need to preventing water pollution which denies us the same 30 billion cubic metres which we need each year.
  o Finally, we need to increase the protection of our water reserves and prevent water theft.

• And – just as is the case for water – there are solutions for every single one of the other four problems. But to solve any problem we first have to recognise it to be a problem in the first place.

• And that recognition is coming at many levels. But, perhaps most importantly it is coming at the level of leadership in Iran.

• Leadership has to provide vision and inspiration.

• Leadership must produce coordination among all the actors.

• Leadership must ensure buy-in from among the stakeholders.

• The very fact that this meeting is being held in Iran demonstrates the resolve with which Iran is addressing environmental issues today.

• The United Nations was also greatly pleased to see that, immediately upon assuming the presidency, H.E. Mr. Rouhani spoke very powerfully and very emotionally about the dire situation in Lake Uromiyeh. He said this: “if the lake dries up this kind of threat will not be comparable to any other kind of threat.” He said if the lake dries up millions of citizens will be forced to migrate from the surrounding areas. President Rouhani has also said that when he met President Karzai of Afghanistan recently
he spent hours talking about the problems of the Hamouns which straddle the border between Afghanistan and Iran.

• Vice-President Madam Ebetkhar – who opened yesterday’s session – has said that we have to face the water problem squarely. She has indeed worked very closely with the United Nations to come up with 31 solutions for water problems facing Iran generally, as well as Lake Uromiyeh and the Hamouns.

2. WHAT PARLIAMENTARIANS CAN DO

• Having heard all of this, you may be asking yourselves: “What can we – as parliamentarians – do to help”?

• Ladies and Gentlemen, you have a key role to play. I would like to share seven ideas with you. Some you will already be practicing, I am sure.

• First. Since you create the political and legislative environment for the successful development and implementation of initiatives which mitigate and adapt to climate change. Your first priority must be to make sure that your country’s environmental legislation is in line with the latest international protocols. In addition, we in the UN would urge that your Governments be actively involved in the forthcoming Climate Change Summit which takes place at the UN Headquarters in New York on 23 September.

• Second. As legislators, you must also make sure that laws are in place to protect and conserve the environment and promote sustainable development. The UN – and specifically UNDP – can render technical assistance to prepare such legislation including all the preparatory work that will be needed starting at ground level with scientific investigation – at your request.

• Third. You can make sure that the issue of the environment is regularly part of the parliamentary agenda – through standing committees,
hearings, and so on. Please actively involve environmental and sustainable development experts into these discussions.

- Fourth. You hold the purse strings. Through your resource allocation decisions, you can see to it that the benefits of economic growth also touch those issues that will ensure our future environmental sustainability.

- Fifth. Many of the bad things that happen to our environment happen because we do not enforce our laws properly. You can review the effectiveness of law enforcement operations to ensure that environmental laws and measures are having a real impact. You can set up a national environmental coordination mechanism or national rapporteur on the environment.

- Sixthly. You can collect and share information on best practices on the environment in your country so that together we can build up the global knowledge base of information on this human security issue. Again, the UN is here to help.

- Seventh and finally, you can interact with parliamentarians from other countries – as you are all doing now – in order to share experiences and good practices. I believe that this meeting will be a great opportunity to start such networking.

- Do these things, ladies and gentlemen, and we will reduce the impact of an angry planet on our future sustainable development prospects.

- *Kheily mamnoun* and thank you.