



INDIA भारत

Opening statement

by

**Minister of External Affairs
Smt. Sushma Swaraj**

At

**Informal Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers on the sidelines of
the
72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

September 21, 2017

**Your Excellency Mr. Krishna Bahadur Mahara,
Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Nepal
Your Excellencies, Foreign Ministers of SAARC Member States
Secretary General of SAARC,**

Distinguished delegates,

It has been a practice for SAARC Foreign Ministers to meet informally on UNGA sidelines and I am happy to meet my esteemed colleagues on this occasion.

This meeting presents us an opportunity to review progress made in various areas of cooperation since the last meeting.

Secretary General's report has provided a detailed update on this. I thank him for that.

Let me begin by reaffirming India's commitment to regional cooperation. We believe that Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas is as relevant to foreign policy as it is to domestic one. India has attached the highest priority to the development and prosperity of the region under its "neighbourhood first" policy. Several initiatives that Prime Minister Modi had announced for the region have already been implemented.

Excellencies,

The South Asia Satellite, a first of its kind initiative, was launched in May 2017. The project will touch the lives of the people of in the region through its wide ranging applications.

The South Asian University is a symbol of our resolve to provide high quality education to our youth. The University has already produced about 900 scholars.

I am delighted to inform this forum that the University held its Second convocation in June this year. India is fully committed to bear the capital cost of SAU and provide land for its new campus. Construction is in full swing. We will ensure speedy completion of the project.

Our region is vulnerable to a wide range of natural disasters. Disaster risk reduction and response therefore form a crucial aspect of our development.

terrorism in all its forms, without any discrimination, and end the ecosystem of its support.

India has hosted the first two meetings of the High Level Group of Eminent Experts to Strengthen SAARC Anti-Terrorism Mechanism. Implementation of the decisions of these meetings as well as those of the Meetings of Home Ministers in both letter and spirit is crucial in this context.

Excellencies,

In closing, I would like to stress that meetings, including high-level ones can only be effective if expressions of resolve are translated in to concrete action on the ground. The focus should be to deliver on the commitments towards tangible action. Ultimately, people's expectations must be met, for SAARC to remain relevant.

I thank you Mr. Chairperson.