



Inaugural Address at the Opening Ceremony

Shri Binoy Viswam

Honourable Minister for Forests and Housing, Kerala

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the issues of global warming studies have taken place in various parts of the globe and that process has been intensified in the recent past. It will be further intensified. It has become a real challenge before the very existence of humanity. Something has to be done and that should not be too late. This is the basic reason which is alerting all of us. In the Forest Department, in the last one or two years, we have collectively attempted to bring these facts to the knowledge of the people. We were trying to give a new face to Social Forestry in the State and in that attempt, we were so particular that it should be taken forward with the support of the people, then only it will become real Social Forestry. We are convinced that not only Social Forestry activities but the whole deeds and thoughts of the Forest Department should also be with the support and participation of the people. Without their involvement no efforts on the part of the Government can be successful. That is our conviction and belief.

Bearing this in mind, we have been trying to implement a number of Social Forestry activities. Many of them, the country took note of. We first went to the school children with the slogan 'Ente Maram' or 'My Tree'. On 5th of June 2007, twenty-five lakh saplings were handed over to the school children of Kerala by Forest Department. The Department of Education came along for our help. Those saplings were taken by the students to their homes and they planted them on 5th June - the World Environment Day. Medha Patkar came to Kerala to bless this campaign. We, both the departments, made a survey and found that more than 80% of the saplings were growing well. The success rate is really a remarkable one. It prompted us to take this campaign to the college campuses with the slogan 'Nammude Maram' or 'Our Tree'. Then we approached the Headload Workers unions of the State. We held workshops of one day



duration in all the districts along with the trade union leaders and with their support we could plant more than 1,10,000 saplings on the sides of the State Highways in Kerala. In all districts they are growing up very well. Of course, response varies from District to District. Then with the support of Fisheries Department and the fishermen on the coastal line in nine districts of Kerala, we could plant 176 hectares of coastal land as part of Harithatheeram Project. Altogether 52 lakh saplings have been planted in two and a half years, which is something really great for this small state. All these campaigns were having the support of various people and we believe that we can take this campaign forward. Now we are aiming at a great imaginative campaign, which we intend to launch on 5th June, 2009. That is a mass campaign called 'Haritha Keralam'. We have held two rounds of discussions with the Minister for Local Self Governments and officials of both the Departments. The idea is to plant one crore seedlings on June 5th in all Panchayaths of Kerala during 2009 and 2010. In each Panchayath, the idea is to plant a minimum 10,000 saplings. If our dreams come true, there will be a popular movement in every part of the state, in villages and in cities. That movement of the people will take care to ensure that these saplings do not perish.

So, at this juncture, when we were planning all these things, to our mind came the idea that there should be a common slogan for all these activities. Thus this slogan was evolved. It says 'Global Warming – Tree is the Answer'. It is true that it is me who coined the slogan but it is not my slogan. It is a slogan of collective thoughts - many of us sat together for hours in many days. We discussed about having a slogan. We discussed about having a slogan like this, then to my mind it flashed and everybody agreed. Once the slogan was coined, we took it to the people also.

Global Warming is a real threat. And that threat has come to the doorsteps of every State in the Country. So nobody can afford to close their eyes on this menace. Thus around one year back, we in a common sitting, thought of organizing a National Workshop of this kind in which our experiences, our anguishes, our dedication, our sincere hopes and our plan of action, should be communicated to shared with all those who are concerned. We took the initiative to provide a platform for that and with all our limitations, the Forest Department decided to host this National Workshop. The response was really impressing and promising. That is how, almost everybody who were invited from all parts of the country expressed their readiness to attend the workshop and you can see most of them have come. Our intention is to provide a theoretical foundation for our activities. That is the theme on which we are all expected to put our heads together and to give the clear cut answers. We are very sure that something positive will come out of this workshop. Studies are telling us that in the last 100 years, this phenomenon of global warming has been taking place. But it was in the scale of 0.62°C in 100 years. Scientists are asking us to think of the coming century. Studies have warned us with an alarm that it may go up to 6°C. If the causes of global warming are allowed to continue like this, it will cause a real danger to the humanity. Mankind cannot survive in that condition. Even a 3°C hike may not be tolerable to the human beings, I am told. As it is known, the glaciers in the distant part of the globe may melt down. It may cause upward trend in the sea level, many cities may be immersed in the water, and many small countries in the south pacific and in the Scandinavia may disappear. These are all the information that we are gathering from the available scientific



literature. This is not a story somebody is telling to frighten anybody. These are all scientific conclusions derived by responsible scientists, which have to be taken into account. This is the background of this National Workshop.

Kerala, as a state, which always has taken the initiative to address such matters and to alert the nation as a whole, is really proud to state that this is the first initiative of such a magnitude in any part of this country. A Government Department in the State Government is taking such a humble but serious initiative on this very important theme, which is really looming large over our destinies. That is how this Workshop is taking place today. We believe that our mutual co-operation in exchange of ideas and our understanding each other would definitely help us. There are countries of the globe which are preaching sermons to other countries that you should do this, you should not do this and all such things. But those sermons are sometimes proven baseless or hollow. The one country which is the biggest source of emission of carbon dioxide is always in the forefront of this preaching. It is not even ready to put signature on the Kyoto Protocol. That country is always trying to talk aloud of human rights. What human rights are there without the right to live? That right to live is also in danger because of their greedy developmental concept. They call it development. At the cost of whom? These countries of G8 formation are developed. But vast majority of countries on the earth like the countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the people therein are the sufferers. Their wealth is being diminished. Their dreams are being shattered. Their people are being tortured. They are thrown to the destinies of war and crime. It is happening all around us. So, it seems, at least I believe, that this is having a political part of it also. It is not a mere party politics: it is politics of the nations. It is a politics of the whole developing countries. It is a politics of the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Those people are repeatedly being treated as scapegoats of some others' development. They are on their way to ask for their share and they are determined to say that this globe is ours. The life is ours. And the future of the planet is so dear to us.

So those activities, which are expected to be done in order to prevent the emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, have to be done immediately. Such a global popular movement is in the offing. And we believe this National Workshop organized by the Kerala State Government will add a new impetus to the peoples' movement all over the globe. The ideas of the developing world, their wishes, anguishes and their desires are to be focused in the proper way. This attempt is important to all of us and this National Workshop will address these issues from an Indian point of view, from our National point of view, from a patriotic point of view, from a point of view which is cherished by the people through so many decades from very many parts of the planet. Governments, popular movements, environmental groups are all thinking in these very same terms. We express our fraternity with all and confirm that we will be together and not be alone. Development has to take place. But not at the cost of the environment; not at the peril of the Nature, not by the beheading the future of mankind. This is the conviction that the people from all parts of the world are trying to impress upon these new proponents of development. There is a doctrine stating that the polluter should pay. The world knows who are the polluters.



Are they really paying? They are not really paying. They are plundering, plundering and plundering! And this plundering of earth cannot be tolerated any more. There should be a full stop to it. Obama, the President of the US has promised change. In all those campaigns, he was repeatedly telling – “change, yes, we can!” People are asking him, what sort of change! Changes in what sectors? The US policies on the issues of environment – are they going to be changed? The US attempts to destabilize the countries in various nooks and corners of the World - are they going to be changed? The US policies on economic matters which caused peril and ruin to that country itself – are they going to be changed? Is not the greed of Merrill Lynch, Lehman Brothers, Washington Mutual, Freidmann the reason for their disaster? Is that going to be changed? These are all interlinked questions. One cannot be separated from the other. The basic motive of profit and profit alone –was the reason behind all these attacks on humanity in various shapes and in various forms. The world expects a change in these policies. And people of Kerala also expect that change. Obama, it is really difficult for him but, should have the courage to fulfill his promise and ensure that changes will take place in the US administration’s approach to the basic matters of environment and future of the globe. That also is a matter to be registered in the course of our deliberations.

I think, some of you may differ with me or agree with me. But these are all matters to be discussed. And our views may be exchanged openly. With these words, I declare National Workshop on Global Warming open.

Thank you very much.

