

World Social Summit, Doha, Qatar 4 - 6 November 2025
Intervention of H.E. Ambassador Md. Golam Sarwar, Secretary General of
SAARC at High-level Round Table 2

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. The Copenhagen Declaration inspired us to put people at the heart of development [**PAUSE**] to advance social justice, eradicate poverty, and promote human dignity. These principles are embedded in the very foundation of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), whose Charter envisions peace, stability, and prosperity for the peoples of South Asia through regional cooperation.
2. Over the years, our region has made measurable strides in poverty reduction, literacy, and life expectancy. Yet, challenges remain deeply intertwined: inequalities persist, malnutrition endures, and the vulnerabilities of women, adolescents, and marginalized communities continue to test our collective resolve.
3. Health and nutrition lie at the core of SAARC's social development agenda. The SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre in Kathmandu and the SAARC and SAARC Agriculture Centre in Dhaka are tangible expressions of our shared commitment to protecting and promoting public health, food and nutritional security.
4. Recognizing that undernutrition and anaemia continue to affect millions, particularly women of reproductive age and young children, SAARC convened the Regional Conference on Anemia earlier this year, in collaboration with UNICEF ROSA and other partners. The conference reaffirmed anaemia as one of South Asia's most persistent yet preventable health challenges.
5. The outcome of that meeting is now guiding us in drafting a regional framework on reducing anaemia, which would help accelerate progress towards SDG's goals on 'Good Health and Well-being'. Moreover, South Asia University in New Delhi, which is a flagship initiative of SAARC, is in the process of establishing SAARC Nutrition Centre, which I'm eagerly waiting to inaugurate on 5th December 2025.
6. Another major event, the SAARC Regional Conference on Adolescent Pregnancy, held last year in collaboration with UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO. This high-level dialogue brought together health officials, experts, and young people from

across our all Member States to address adolescent pregnancy as a multidimensional issue [PAUSE] encompassing health, education, and gender equality.

7. The conference produced a shared commitment to: Strengthen comprehensive sexuality health education and reproductive health services; Address the socio-cultural norms that drive early marriage and early childbearing; and Empower adolescent girls through education, information, and community engagement.

8. These collective efforts contribute directly to SDGs 3, 4, and 5, and to the core commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration, [PAUSE] particularly the empowerment of women and youth as agents of social transformation.

9. SAARC's Plan of Action on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aligns our regional priorities with the global goals. Through our specialized Centres and Working Groups, we promote data sharing, policy dialogue, and capacity building across Member States. We continue to collaborate closely with UN agencies, notably UNDP, FAO, WHO, UNFPA, and UNICEF, to support evidence-based policymaking and to strengthen regional cooperation mechanisms.

10. Our efforts remain guided by the principle of leaving no one behind [PAUSE] ensuring that development reaches every child, every woman, and every community, especially those living in poverty, displacement, or environmental vulnerability.

Excellencies,

11. As we gather here to renew our collective commitment to social development, let us also commit to deepen cooperation within the region and across regional bodies. Health, nutrition, and social inclusion transcend borders; they are shared challenges that require shared solutions. By strengthening collaboration [PAUSE] through the exchange of data, regional health surveillance, and joint capacity building, we can transform obstacles into opportunities for collective progress and resilience.

We must continue to invest in youth and women. The empowerment of young people, particularly adolescent girls, must remain at the center of our development agenda. Access to quality education, digital literacy, and reproductive health is not optional; it is fundamental to achieving inclusive and sustainable social transformation. When we invest in young people, we invest in the future and stability of our societies.

Let us also focus on building strong partnerships for social development. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals demands a whole-of-society approach. Governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector must work hand in hand, supported by robust international partnerships and South–South cooperation.

Distinguished Delegates,

12. The vision of Copenhagen and the promise of Agenda 2030 remind us that social development is not an act of charity [PAUSE] it is an act of justice. It is the path to peace, resilience, and dignity for all.

13. The peoples of South Asia [PAUSE] one-fourth of humanity, stand united in this vision. Through SAARC, we reaffirm our determination to build a region where every child is nourished, every adolescent is empowered, every woman and man is respected, and every individual can live with equality and hope.

14. Together, let us transform these aspirations into lasting realities, for South Asia, and for the world.

I thank you.