

PRESS RELEASE



CSM briefing visit to Washington DC changes the climate on Indo-US climate relations

Kolkata: 19 May 2009

CSM concluded a successful 2-day Briefing Visit to Washington DC on India and climate change today with a meeting with Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The independent delegation of Indian experts gave high-level briefings at the White House, State Department, US Senate and the House of Representatives. The Delegation also addressed the NGO and policy community at fora organized by the United Nations Foundation, Worldwatch Institute, Centre for American Progress and World Resources Institute.

Speaking at a reception for the CSM delegation, Chris Flavin, President of Worldwatch Institute said, the day marked an exciting new chapter in Indo-US relations.

The first time such an initiative had been taken by an Indian non-profit, CSM's visit brought a breath of fresh air from the sub-continent on the critical joint challenge of climate change. The visit achieved its objective of establishing a new non-governmental front on Indo-US climate action and diplomacy. Organised in partnership with the Pew Environment Group, the Briefing Visit took place from Monday 18th to Tuesday 19th May 2009.

The 4-member Delegation comprised: Dr Harish Hande, managing director and co-founder of SELCO India; Mr. Prem Shankar Jha, author, columnist and media expert; Ms Malini Mehra, founder & CEO, Centre for Social Markets; and Dr. Arivudai Nambi, Director of the Climate Change Programme, M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai.

Interest in the Delegation was high. Coming on the heels of the Indian elections, and at a time when the Obama Administration had pledged

climate leadership and legislation was being debated in the House of Representatives, the Visit was well-timed and drew strong interest.

The multi-stakeholder Delegation's message was simple and powerful: the US had no need to fear India. Civil society and business was beginning to wake to the climate challenge and moving. Given the gravity of the problem, this was a time for partnership not confrontation. The politics needed to move from one of blame to opportunity and action.

Reframing a debate that had long been set by official views, the visit brought fresh perspectives, vision and energy on how the US and India could work together to address climate change as a shared dilemma.

Everywhere the Delegation met with open doors and open minds on how the two countries could actively work together to address climate impacts, meet energy needs and adaptation challenges.

Speaking of her satisfaction at the visit, delegation leader Malini Mehra, CEO, Centre for Social Markets, said: 'Our visit has dispelled a number of myths, that Indians don't care about climate change and that we are reluctant to act. Equally we have found huge receptivity on the US side. We need to bury our stereotypes about each other and get moving on this agenda with far greater seriousness, energy and imagination.' Referring to the 2.5 million Americans of Indian origin, she spoke of the need to engage them as bridge builders to overcome outdated 'us and them' mindsets: "Climate change is not an American problem or an Indian problem it is a mutual problem and we both need to take ownership of it and start leading on it."

Delegation member, Dr Harish Hande, managing director and co-founder of SELCO India, one of India's most respected solar entrepreneurs, said: "The meetings were a breath of fresh air and brought hope that India and the US could really shape the world in terms of tackling climate change, provided we viewed the world as one and not as different countries. Everywhere we got a single message - we do not have time and we need to act fast."

Veteran columnist and energy expert, Prem Shankar Jha, spoke of the "invaluable opportunity" that the visit had given him to "gauge the seriousness of the Obama Administration's desire to fight global warming, and, therefore, the sincerity of its desire to make India a party to the effort." He said: "I came away from our meetings greatly reassured, but also reminded once again that just as we have to cope

with democratic pressures from interest groups, so do they. I hope this realization is reciprocal and will inform the negotiations that will precede the Copenhagen conference." The visit also gave him a "chance to explain India's stand on the issue of burden sharing, and to highlight the recent evolution of thinking within the government on how India can best contribute to the success of the conference." In conclusion, he noted. "I am taking away valuable insights from this visit that I will attempt to share with policy makers and my readers, upon my return to India."

Dr. Arivudai Nambi, adaptation expert at the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, and fourth member of the Delegation, spoke of the importance of this initiative "not only as a member of the delegation, but, more importantly as a concerned citizen of India. It was a great learning experience and I am sure this visit has opened new avenues for constructive action."

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Further details on CSM, the Delegation and the visit can be found on the CSM website: www.csmworld.org

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