Prof. Saleemul Huq OBE – Hon. DSc

Chancellor Dharker

Glasgow, the 19th Century. The height of the industrial revolution. The banks of the river Clyde, like those of the Tyne, are a mass of heavy industry, the machines and ships built there projecting power and commerce across the globe, building wealth for some but leaving a legacy of pollution and climate change for the future.

Glasgow, November 2021. The Clyde is quieter, much of the manufacturing having moved elsewhere. Now, the riverside is home to, among other things, the Scottish Events Campus which has been designated as United Nations territory for two weeks to host the UN Climate Change Conference, better known as COP26.

The irony of holding COP26 at a centre of the industrial revolution could hardly have been lost on Saleemul Huq. The energetic veteran of every COP meeting to date was there as an advisor to the caucus of Least Developed Countries – the nations first to feel the devastating effects of that climate change legacy – supporting them in their diplomatic tug of war to create a fund to address the loss and damage they face. After the 'fund' was downgraded to a 'dialogue' at the last moment, he expressed his disgust in language that earned him a telling off from the BBC and much love from social media. A year later, COP27 did establish a fund. This is painstaking diplomacy, but it is against the clock.

Professor Saleemul Huq – Saleem to his friends – is one of the world's most influential climate scientists. Like many of us, he is an academic, researcher and teacher, but unlike many of us he bridges science and policy brilliantly. Named by the journal Nature as a 'climate revolutionary', and ranked among the top 20 climate change influencers, his work is

nevertheless rooted in the daily experience of his home country. The results can be seen on and in the ground of Bangladesh.

Saleem was born in 1952 in Karachi to parents who worked in Pakistan's diplomatic service before they opted for Bangladesh when it was established following the 1971 Liberation War. Their overseas postings meant he had an international childhood, growing up in Germany, Indonesia, and Kenya. Following a passion and talent for science, he studied Botany at Imperial College London, completing his PhD in 1979.

He worked in Bangladesh as an academic biologist, in 1984 co-founding a Think Tank, the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, focussing on environmental issues at a time when they were hardly a priority in public discourse. The Centre proved profoundly influential, however, helping the government of Bangladesh to establish an environment department and create its first environmental action plan.

Bangladesh is on the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers and has one of the world's highest population densities. River flooding and cyclones from the Bay of Bengal mean that the coastal regions are susceptible to sea-level rise and saltwater intrusion. Human-caused climate change means that adverse events are increasingly intense, but because of the changes that Saleem and his colleagues have catalysed, cyclone warning and evacuation are now highly successful, leading to massive reductions in mortality. Practical approaches such as rainwater harvesting in areas of increased salinity are commonplace. Bangladesh has shifted from seeing itself as a highly vulnerable nation to a most resilient one, rich in climate experience, knowledge and skills. There's an intensity of interest in climate issues in Bangladesh that extends to three news channels reporting daily on COP conferences!

Saleem is now Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development and Professor at the Independent University of Bangladesh, a Senior Associate at the

International Institute on Environment and Development in the UK, and Senior Adviser on Locally Led Adaptation with the Global Centre on Adaptation based in the Netherlands. He has used these platforms to make major contributions in adaptation, in funding for Loss and Damage, and in growing capacity to address climate challenges.

By 2001 when Saleem came to be a lead author of reports produced by the International Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC), scientists were telling policymakers that warming will happen and that we will have to adapt. However, only a small proportion of adaptation aid seems to be reaching communities that have local knowledge and face the full force of climate events. Saleem and his colleagues have fostered locally-led adaptation in areas like living conditions, water supplies, resilient crops, shelter for displaced people, migrant-friendly towns, and platforms for sharing experience. He says that technology has an important place, but – fundamentally – transformation is brought about by people.

Now, Saleem argues, we are entering an era when loss and damage are inevitable. His work on Loss and Damage funding has required persistence over a decade up to Glasgow, and patience (to avoid a diplomatic incident, don't mention liability or compensation!). Saleem's colleague Dr Feisal Rahman tells me "I remember back in 2015 everyone including myself thought that this loss and damage agenda will never materialize! But Saleem had his eyes on this and now at least part of the job is done!"

He has had many international distinctions: the McNamara Fellowship from World Bank, the Duggan Fellowship from the US National Resources Defence Council, the 2006 Burtoni Award, and a National Environment Award from the Government of Bangladesh. He was created OBE in the 2022 New Year Honours for services to combating climate change and was a leading contributor to the reports of the IPCC which won the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.

Education and networks will be the foundations for a generation better equipped than ours to face the future in a changed climate. Saleem has been instrumental in establishing the Least Developed Countries Universities Consortium on Climate Change (LUCCC) and the Gobeshona Global 24/7 conferences that aim to turn research into action. He is already a friend of our University, serving as an external advisor to the Living Deltas Research Hub led by Professor Andy Large. Dr Rahman tells me that Saleem's focus on building future capacity means empowering and trusting young people with leadership and maintaining his own appetite for knowledge. According to Feisal, "even at this age the guy simply does not want to give up learning new things".

Chancellor Dharker, in recognition of his contributions to climate science and locally led adaptation, his international leadership on Loss and Damage, and his inspirational approach to the future not dominated by national rivalry but by solidarity, I present to you Professor Saleemul Huq OBE for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa.*

Prof. J S Fitzgerald

Public Orator

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