The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established when the idea of developing the region was first mooted in 1975 by Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan later became a member of SAARC during the Fourteenth SAARC Summit held in India, in July 2007.

Until 2009, Japan, Republic of Korea, China, Russia, and European Union had observer status in SAARC.

SAARC provides a platform for the peoples of South Asia to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and mutual respect and understanding. It aims to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life through sustained economic growth, social progress and cultural development.

During the Fifteenth Summit, the Heads of State or Government emphasised the importance of maintaining the momentum through clear lists of targets that had already underway and future activities and recognized the need for SAARC to continue developing and implementing regional and sub-regional projects in the agreed areas. They reiterated their resolve to follow up in the next two years to ensure that the agreed activities were implemented.

Preparatory Meetings were held on 4-6 January 2002 in Kathmandu, the Foreign Secretaries in 1983 in New Delhi identified areas of cooperation. The areas of cooperation were reconstituted Regional Integration, Agriculture, Health and Population, Development in the region and Postal Services. Working Groups have also been established in the areas of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Telecommunication, energy, climate change, transport, poverty alleviation, science and technology, trade, education, food security and tourism.

Regional cooperation is seen as a complement to the bilateral and multilateral relations of SAARC Member States.

Cooperation in SAARC is based on the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence and non-interference in internal affairs of the member states and mutual benefits.

Regional cooperation is complemented by the bilateral and multilateral relations of SAARC Member States.

The SAARC Secretariat is based in Kathmandu. It coordinates SAARC programs of cooperation, approves projects including regional and sub-regional projects in the agreed areas, prepares the agenda for the meetings, and serves as a channel of communication between the Association and its Member States as well as other regional organizations.

The Heads of State or Government of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka met for the Nineteenth SAARC Summit on 16-17 November 2006 in Dhaka, Bangladesh and entered into force on 7 January 2007. Korea, USA, Iran, Mauritius, Australia, Myanmar and the European Union have joined SAARC as Observers.

The Declaration on SAARC was adopted at the General Council Meeting prior to the First SAARC Summit, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 29-31 December 1981. The Declaration on SAARC was formally approved on the basis of unanimity. Bilateral and contentious issues are excluded from the discussions and deliberations of SAARC.

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SAARC has developed collaboration, without a MoU with other organizations such as Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Deutche Geselschaft fur Forschung im Ausland (DFG), Asian Development Bank (ADB) 2004; World Bank (WB) 2004; Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature (SAARCLAW), South Asian Federation of Surgeons, Federation of Exchange and Oncologists. Has been accorded to professional groups in South Asia such as Association of South Asia Foundation (SAF) and Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature (PSADWA). Published by the SAARC Scientific Secretariat and the Government of India. SAARC has developed collaboration, without a MoU with other organizations such as Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Deutche Geselschaft fur Forschung im Ausland (DFG), Asian Development Bank (ADB) 2004; World Bank (WB) 2004; Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature (SAARCLAW), South Asian Federation of Surgeons, Federation of Exchange and Oncologists. Has been accorded to professional groups in South Asia such as Association of South Asia Foundation (SAF) and Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature (PSADWA). Published by the SAARC Scientific Secretariat and the Government of India.