

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA, HIS EXCELLENCY BENJAMIN WILLIAM MKAPA, AT THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION TO REVIEW UNCED AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

New York, 23 June 1997

Mr. President,
The Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Distinguished Representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I feel deeply honoured and privileged to address this Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. I should like to commend the Chairman of the Fifth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, Dr. Mustafa Tolba, Members of the Bureau and the Secretariat, and all Delegations for their good work in preparing for this Special Session of the General Assembly. It is thanks to their collective effort that our work has been lightened, and greatly facilitated.

Mr. President,

In 1992, an unprecedented event took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, when leaders of 181 Governments, and many Non-Governmental Organisations, met to discuss issues relating to the global environment and development. At that meeting, two international agreements were signed. Additionally, two statements of principle and a major action plan on world-wide sustainable development, were adopted.

The adoption of Agenda 21 was a unique expression of universal commitment to the formation of a new global partnership, at all levels, to enhance sustainable economic and social development, by protecting the environment on which such development depends. This is a global partnership we must keep and nurture, for on it depends the future welfare of humanity, and the survival of its civilization.

Five years after Rio, we have gathered here to look back over the distance we have travelled individually and collectively towards that goal, and see whether we can recharge the spirit of global partnership which is apparently waning. We need to exchange views and experiences on our successes and failures, and indeed on whether Agenda 21 has in fact received the national and international political support it so much deserves and needs to succeed.

We set lofty objectives and undertook solemn commitments at Rio. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us today to make an honest and meaningful review, not only for the sake of those of us gathered here, but especially for those who have entrusted us with the honourable task of representing them. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China believe that in undertaking the review of the Rio Earth Summit, and because the stakes are palpable, the actors have been identified, and modalities agreed upon, it is not proper to re-negotiate on commitments freely undertaken in 1992. To backtrack on the global consensus of Rio would do great damage to the momentum already achieved, and which if lost might never be recaptured.

Mr. President,

What made Rio unique and important in terms of the achievements of UNCED was the recognition by world leaders of not only the imminent environmental crisis in its many facets, but also how the crisis was embedded in our economic and social systems. We knew and accepted that there would be no painless adjustments and solutions. We recognised that a realistic and long-term resolution of the crisis lay in dealing squarely with the challenge of simultaneously fostering environmental protection and development, in an

integrated manner, through an unprecedented global partnership. For, the consequences of environmental degradation and pollution respect no borders - they affect equally the polluters and those who do not pollute, the rich and the poor, and hence the concept of common but differentiated responsibilities for all of us.

Mr. President,

While the overall assessment of the implementation of Agenda 21 on a global scale is mixed, there is agreement that notable progress has been achieved especially by developing countries. International environmental conventions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought have been concluded and are now in force.

Agreements have also been concluded on the straddling and migratory fish stocks, the adoption of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Small Island Developing States, and the elaboration of the Global Programme for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land Based Activities.

These are good achievements and we have cause to be gratified by them. But they are, nevertheless, modest by the standards we had in mind in 1992, and we still have to see how they will be implemented. For example, while we had agreed at Rio to reach the United Nations target of developed countries contributing 0.7 per cent of their GNP towards Official Development Assistance (ODA), that contribution has in fact declined substantially since Rio in 16 out of the 21 members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD. This led to an overall decrease in the combined aid effort of DAC countries from 0.34% of their GNP in 1992 to 0.27% in 1995, and 0.25% only at present.

Yet, we had all agreed at Rio that for quite some time to come, the capacity of developing countries to implement Agenda 21 will depend critically on increased flows to them of net ODA. This disastrous decline in ODA has, therefore, eroded the capacity of developing countries, and slowed down the speed at which they would have liked to implement the Rio agreements and action-plan. As a result, we have continued to witness environmental degradation which could have easily been prevented through simple poverty reduction measures financed by ODA. Poverty has worsened in some areas, and income inequality within and between nations has widened.

Mr. President,

In many developing countries, the concept is increasingly being accepted that investment and trade are more secure and dignified foundations for sustainable growth and development. They appeal to our pursuit for self-determined and self-reliant development. The vast majority of us are taking great political risks to create favourable domestic conditions for local and foreign direct investment, in the hope that sufficient investments will come, and external trading opportunities occur, to make ODA unnecessary and superfluous in the long run.

Mr. President,

It is true that in the last five years there have been substantial increases in net FDI to developing countries as a whole, from USD 22.6 bn in 1991 to USD 60 bn in 1995. We also recognise and commend recent developments in G-7 policy to promote trade and investment in Africa. But true to the private entrepreneurial spirit, FDI's focus is always on projects that yield quick returns, and not necessarily those compatible with the Rio goals of sustainable development. Secondly, not all developing countries have in place that level of human resource capacity, and infrastructural development necessary to be attractive to FDI. Most of such countries are in sub-Saharan Africa. As of now FDI interest in most such countries is minimal, regardless of

those countries' great efforts at political and economic reform.

Most developing countries continue to improve their investment regimes and other aspects of regulatory framework to encourage both domestic and foreign investment. But a lot of investments are still required to refine it, to build the necessary financial and human capacity, to build the necessary infrastructure, and to integrate economies, all of which can help to attract FDI. Such investments will continue to need and depend on ODA funding. In terms of development financing, FDI and ODA are in completely different leagues, and they cannot be interchangeable.

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China I should like to thank the four OECD countries that have attained, and surpassed, the UN target of contributing 0.7% of their GNP to ODA. Let them be an inspiration to others so that we can reduce poverty faster, contribute to sustainable development of humankind, and create a better environment for private investment and trade until they gradually replace ODA as the backbone of sustainable development.

In the same vein, due to the pressing funding needs, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) capital should be increased substantially beyond the current amount of about 2 billion US dollars. This would enable the Fund to provide adequate finance for the programmes that are within its mandate, as well as new areas which do not have funding mechanisms of their own such as the Convention on Desertification and Drought. In addition, the GEE mandate needs to be reviewed, and efforts made to streamline its decision-making process to make it less cumbersome, less bureaucratic and more transparent in line with current thinking.

Additionally, there should be a more conducive international economic environment to enable developing countries increase the production of goods and services, and have greater access to the developed countries' markets. This will help them generate more of their own resources with which to address questions of poverty eradication, and their huge development needs and challenges.

I heartily welcome recent policy statements within the United States Government, and the direction the recent G-7 Summit at Denver took, to give practical support to investment and trade in Africa. But, I should like to emphasise that for the least developed countries, these welcome initiatives can not be a substitute for ODA, but should be seen as an addition to it. Only then can quicker results emerge.

Mr. President,

There is also the need to look afresh at the question of commodity prices and terms of trade for the least developed countries. Our development partners need to show political willingness to participate in a new round of commodity schemes aimed at the rationalization of the supply of raw materials, while guaranteeing fair remunerative prices for our natural resources. In this way we hope the earnings of the developing countries will increase and help not only in the alleviation of poverty but also in making resources available to implement all programmes within Agenda 21.

The period since Rio has been characterized by globalization and liberalization of the world economy. The initial assessment is that this liberalization has not progressed at the same pace as the construction and realization of sustainable development. This is why we also need to ensure that globalisation is pursued in compatibility with the overriding objective of sustainable development. In this regard, the private sector, including multinational companies, have a critical role to play in preventing damage to the environment.

Mr. President,

No area perhaps deserves more urgent attention than the external indebtedness of developing countries, an indebtedness that stifles growth and consigns the developing world to the vicious 'cycle of debt and poverty. It should now be acknowledged, for example, that Africa's external debt is unsustainable and a major drag

on whatever initiatives for growth, development, and environmental conservation we might undertake. Debt service is gobbling up over 30% of Africa's export revenues, 25% of our savings, and over 4% of Africa's GDP. With Africa's low level of savings, such a burden is clearly unmanageable.

Debt rescheduling can work for some developing countries, but for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries, more needs to be done in terms of debt stock cancellation at least for those countries that have clearly demonstrated the will and determination to put their economies in order. Multi-lateral debt, which in Africa accounts for nearly half of the total debt service, is a major area of concern. We appreciate recent initiatives to reduce debts both within the "Naples terms" of the Paris Club, as well as those within the multi-lateral framework. But when criteria for eligibility are too stringent, or if the promised relief is to come in the too distant future, the medicine may arrive when the patient is beyond help.

Mr. President,

In Rio we recognised the fact that technology transfer was essential for developing countries if they are to make the transition to sustainable development. However, the process of technology transfer to developing countries has not been as fast as expected. Developing countries lack sufficient resources to acquire package technologies or pay royalties. They lack Research and Development capacity, and skilled manpower, among other problems. But, developing countries need to access technology, including environmentally sound and affordable technologies, if they are to play their rightful role in the implementation of Agenda 21. It is, therefore, imperative that we arrive at internationally agreed modalities on how to transfer technology from developed to developing countries on a predictable and sustainable basis.

A majority of developing countries have accepted the role of the private sector and the market economy in their development. It is, however, our belief that technology transfer cannot be achieved through market forces, or the private sector alone. For this reason it is necessary to initiate and promote publicly funded technology and Research and Development projects, including the establishment of regional technology centres, which would encourage development and transfer of technology, on concessional terms. It is imperative that developed countries support, both financially and through technical assistance programmes, the efforts of developing countries in this area. The World Trade Organisation is also urged to undertake a review of the TRIPS agreements, as soon as possible, with a view to relaxing the conditions for the transfer of technology, particularly of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries.

Mr. President,

Apart from these cross-sectoral issues which constitute the main impediments to the effective implementation of Agenda 21, there is also a need to find solutions to critical sectoral issues such as environmental degradation caused by unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, particularly in the developed economies. We also need to implement the recommendations of the intergovernmental forum on forests, and resolve outstanding issues such as the establishment of a financial mechanism for the Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought, and the reduction of green house gas emissions. There is also the challenge to agree on measures to improve energy efficiency and develop new, clean and renewable sources of energy for development such as biomass, hydro-electric power, and solar energy, particularly in the developing countries.

In September, last year, the World Solar Summit took place in Harare, at which occasion the importance of developing solar energy as a clean, renewable source of energy was underlined. Many developing countries have come up with solar energy projects that could be very useful in that regard. I call upon developed countries and the wider donor community to actively and practically support the implementation of those projects.

Speaking on behalf of Tanzania, my Government has followed with keen interest the processes set in motion, through the United Nations, by the historic Summit on Environment and Development, which brought to the fore global concerns of crucial significance. The Summit also generated a lot of hopes particularly for developing countries under the grip of the consequences of poverty and environmental degradation. Against the background of hope and expectation, commitments undertaken, determination and absolute will to act together, Tanzania is working closely with countries in the Africa region, and the developing world as a whole, to achieve sustainable development.

An overview of activities initiated in Tanzania for that purpose, is documented in our National Report prepared for the Commission for Sustainable Development. It includes a national analysis of the mayor environmental problems facing us, and the policy initiatives and programmes undertaken to address them. These include rehabilitation of critically affected lands in dry and semi-arid areas; pollution control measures particularly in our fast-growing urban areas, including sewage and solid waste management, and storm-water drainage; and the protection of water resources and their catchment areas.

The policy and legislative framework on the environment is under review. A number of environmental management tools are also being codified and drafted to facilitate environmental planning and co-ordination. Tanzania has ratified all the relevant Conventions on the major themes endorsed by the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, and is now working on programmes to implement them. I believe this is also true of most developing countries. We express our gratitude to the friendly institutions and countries whose co-operation we enjoy, and which we will continue to count upon.

Mr. President,

I hope that my statement has made it clear that the developing countries are ready and willing to implement commitments undertaken in Rio de Janeiro five years ago. This is true of our readiness to advocate and implement the objectives of Agenda 21, the Global Conventions, and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development

I am convinced that this Special Session of the General Assembly can, if we want, prove to be yet another milestone on the journey towards the long-term objective of sustainable development. Reaffirmation our commitment to the implementation of Agenda 21 will give a new momentum to international co-operation in support of our sustainable development efforts as we enter the next millennium. Allow me to hope that this Special Session will mark the beginning of a renewed global partnership for sustainable development.

It is a global partnership in which we hope to see due consideration being given to arrangements for financing sustainable development and poverty reduction measures through increased ODA and FDI, and preferential and unrestricted access to markets of developed countries. It is a partnership in which the urgent need for full political and financial support to the Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought, and for financing clean and renewable sources of energy, will be recognized.

It is also a partnership in which we want cleaner and more efficient and environmentally sound technologies to be transferred to developing countries, and UNDP's Capacity 21 project for capacity building financed. We should leave here with clear targets and goals, within set time frames and identified means of their achievement, taking into account the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.

This is the kind of global partnership to which the Group of 77 and China commit themselves for the common benefit of future generations.

Thank you for your kind attention.