



**STATEMENT BY MR. BYRON BLAKE, AMBASSADOR, PERMANENT MISSION OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UN ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA DURING THE THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS ON AFRICA AT THE SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (CSD-16) (New York, 8 May 2008)**

Mr. Chairman,

1. I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Group 77 and China. Allow me to express our gratitude to you for the diligent manner in which you and the Bureau of the CSD-16 have conducted this session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. We trust that the efforts you and all the other stakeholders in the process have put in will be reflected in the discussions and the final outcome of the session.

Mr. Chairman,

2. Africa is the most vulnerable and disadvantaged continent in terms of being able to adapt to and mitigate of negative aspects relating to the thematic issues of sustainable development; capacity to develop and tap related potential benefits; and development of adequate infrastructure. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the international community committed itself to support Africa's sustainable development challenges and needs,. Further, since 2002, African countries, operating at all levels, have adopted several programmes and actions targeted at strengthening implementation at the regional level.

3. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a mechanism that represents a collective desire and commitment of African countries to achieve sustainable economic and social development including poverty eradication. It is also an opportunity for African countries to take charge of their own destinies. The NEPAD priorities include establishing the conditions for sustainable development by ensuring peace and security and by adopting a new policy reforms and increased investment in the key sectors including, in industrial productivity, competitiveness and diversity, access to modern energy services, transport systems and infrastructure, human resources development with a focus on environment, health, education, science and technology, building and improving infrastructure and mobilizing resources.

4. African countries have collectively, through the African Union, NEPAD and individually, taken a number of steps to address sustainable development in a holistic manner. The Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) has been adopted as a framework not only to address African agricultural issues but also rural development in general. In the Maputo Declaration, African Heads of State and Government have committed their governments to allocate 10 percent of national budgets to agriculture and rural development. Many African countries have also adopted and are implementing decentralization policies in an attempt to bring government services to those who need them most.

Mr. Chairman,

5. The recent improvement in growth and economic stability in some countries across the continent promise successes in reaching the Millennium Development Goals, if given sufficient levels of support in its endeavor. The support needed includes the expansion of HIV/AIDS treatment,

increased support to agriculture, better access to water and sanitation, and expanded Quick Impact Initiatives, such as malaria control and an end to user fees for primary education. All of these hold potential and hope for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Africa. There is, therefore, an urgent need to scale up efforts as part of the MDG-based national development strategies on which many of African countries have been working.

6. The Group urges the international community, through the CSD, to refocus global efforts on addressing the special needs of Africa. In this regard we welcome the initiative of the African Union, endorsed by the UN General Assembly, to convene a high-level meeting to address the special needs of Africa on 22 September 2008. We are of the view that the special needs of Africa should be given the highest political attention by the international community, in order to successfully address the continent's development challenges. In that regard the focus on Africa at UNCTAD X11 in Accra Ghana was a welcomed development. We urge other processes to build on or implement, as appropriate, the outcomes as set out in the Accra Accord.

Mr. Chairman,

7. Despite some positive signs of efforts being made by a number of African countries in reducing poverty and hunger, we are witnessing a rise in global food prices. This leads us to be concerned that the high prices are threatening to undo the gains achieved in the MDGs, taking into account that budgeted resources intended to finance the MDGs will be diverted to food crisis in Africa. We call upon the international community to support Africa in addressing this new challenge including through substantial increase in investments and expenditure in agriculture, as well as the need to push for an open system of trade in agricultural commodities, which would benefit countries in Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

8. As you all know, the economies of Africa depend very much on agriculture. While cash crops have been registering low returns in the international commodity markets, the food crops are becoming scarce and prices are rising. We urge the international community to consider bold measures to guarantee availability affordable food to the poorest. In the medium term, substantial increase in expenditures and therefore support on mechanized agriculture will be highly needed. In particular, trade and investment need support through aid for trade and other international interventions in order to bring about a "green revolution" of improved agricultural productivity across Africa. Moreover, any potential advantages to be gained by African exports from a rise in commodity prices on the world market, will not be realized without the requisite transfer of technologies to boost productive capacities necessary to improve competitiveness.

Mr. Chairman,

9. African countries face major constraints in agriculture such as weak basic infrastructure that include transport, utilities and communication, in addition to lack of research and development. These constraints negatively affect costs, sustainability and the quality of production. Inadequate agricultural infrastructure, inputs, superior inputs variety and research and development worsen the performance of African countries. Key to this state of affairs is inadequate financial intermediaries to address the required investments in agriculture. Given the dependency of this sector in the economies of Africa, multilateral financing agencies are encouraged to offer better terms to African countries for investment in Agriculture. External assistance is required to boost this sector and compliment efforts exerted by African countries.

Mr. Chairman,

10. African economies depend on trade in commodities with very little or no value addition. Sixty-five percent of total exports from Africa emanate from the commodity sector and approximately half of the countries in Africa derive 80 percent of their export earnings from commodities, particularly agricultural commodities. Such heavy reliance on the agriculture sector underscores the need for tapping the potential of non-agricultural economic activities and enhancement of the capacity to diversify into other sectors and income-earning activities.

11. Further, Africa it is a continent that has least adopted science and technology necessary for development. Globally, Africa, especially sub Sahara Africa, has been attracting the least foreign direct investment due to a host of factors including sovereign risks and lack of requisite human capacity and physical infrastructure, to name just a few.

12. Another worrying trend is that while ODA is declining, resource outflows, including financial outflows from Africa are increasing. Considering that Africa are addressing the challenges of economic and humanitarian issues within their capability, by fostering an enabling domestic environment, increased ODA would further encourage such efforts.

13. We repeat our call for a successful conclusion of the Doha Round of negotiations which were launched in 2001. A successful Doha Development Agenda will contribute tremendously in integrating developing countries, especially Africa, in the global economy. We reiterate that Aid for Trade should not be a substitute for existing support but must be additional, and demand driven, covering all needs for strengthening supply capacity including infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman,

15. Africa had demonstrated its commitment, and it is now time for the international community to do its part by fulfilling development commitments. In this regard, the Johannesburg plan of implementation calls on the international community to support Africa's efforts to promote peace, stability and security, the resolution and prevention of conflicts, democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development and gender equality.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.