



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MR. BYRON BLAKE, AMBASSADOR, PERMANENT MISSION OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UN, DURING THE SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON THE THEME OF AGRICULTURE (New York, 5 May 2008)

Madam Chair,

1. I have the honour to deliver this Statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on this vital theme of Agriculture. Please be assured of the fullest support and cooperation of the Group in the execution of your duties. We are confident that under the able stewardship of the Chairman and his Bureau, CSD-16 will achieve a positive outcome.
2. We thank the Secretary-General for his reports, particularly that relating to Agriculture contained in document E/CN.17/2008/3, which serves as a useful guide for our deliberations. We also wish to thank the panelists for their insightful presentations.
3. The Group of 77 and China reiterates that the discussions on agriculture, as well as the other thematic issues, should be undertaken within the context of sustainable development, emphasizing the three pillars - economic development, social development and environmental protection - which are mutually reinforcing and interrelated.
4. The review on agriculture cannot be de-linked from the other components of the thematic cluster for the implementation cycle 2008-2009 namely rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa. Given that they all form part of a whole, we should adopt an integrated approach to their consideration in the review process.
5. The Group of 77 and China is of the view that the thematic discussion on Agriculture is indeed timely given the vital role that this sector plays in the reduction of poverty and hunger and in the overall achievement of sustainable development, particularly in developing countries.
6. It is timely also given, among other things:
 - the looming food crisis arising from the growing scarcity of some critical food staples, rapidly escalating food prices and increasing income inequalities;
 - increasing prices of key agricultural inputs including fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and transport, which will reduce future production;
 - continued impasse in negotiating international agricultural trading rules, the persistence of massive agricultural subsidies by developed countries and the prospects of resorting to even greater protectionism in the face of growing food shortages;
 - macro economic policies such as increasing interest rates intended to deal with other global challenges, for example, the current financial crisis and exchange rate instability; and
 - climate change and climate variability crisis with severe implications for crop yields, variety losses, land degradation and deforestation.

The assessment undertaken within this review session must be against the backdrop of these enormous challenges confronted by developing countries.

Madam Chair,

7. When world leaders assembled at UN Headquarters in 2000, they established a 15-year benchmark to achieve a number of development goals including halving extreme poverty and hunger. The world was experiencing then one of the longest periods of economic growth, almost 50 years in the case of agriculture. This year marks the mid-point to 2015. The Secretary General's report makes it clear that while there has been some progress before the current crises, in terms of the proportion of the hungry including in developing countries, the actual number of hungry persons has been increasing since the establishment of the targets. This has been the case in spite of the fact that developing countries have made significant gains in a number of sectors.

8. Suffice it to say, the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals are intricately interlinked and mutually reinforcing; hence the achievement of Goal 1 will have a direct positive effect on the achievement of the other MDGs.

9. The limited progress in implementing MDG-1 is attributed in part to the fact that although developing countries have made remarkable and impressive strides in a number of other sectors and in policy reform, growth in the agricultural sector has largely been lagging behind. More needs to be done at the national, regional and international levels to harness the potential of agriculture which is critical in fostering rural development and improving the livelihoods of the poor, thus enhancing their quality of life.

10. Within this context, the Group of 77 believes that in light of the key role that women play in food production in developing countries, women should be accorded greater access to agricultural inputs and services, land, tools, technology, training programmes and participation in decision-making.

11. As the Secretary-General's report rightly noted, agricultural production has been and will continue to be severely impacted by events associated with climate change. The frequency and intensity of extreme weather events including droughts, floods and hurricanes as well as the projected rise in global temperature and water scarcity, will all have serious implications for food security. This is further exacerbated by the fact that developing countries are not adequately equipped to fully implement adaptation measures; neither do they possess the capacity to invest in research to mitigate the effects of climate change.

12. Given that developing countries are highly dependent on agriculture for nutrition and livelihoods, it is imperative that agriculture be placed at the centre of the international and national development agendas.

13. The Secretary General's report has also shown that international trade in agricultural commodities has moved against developing countries and in favour of developed countries over the last forty years. In this situation, which threatens to get worse, developing countries are disenchanted with the lack of progress in the Doha Development round of trade negotiations, intended to adjust the imbalance.

14. We are deeply concerned about the six-year deadlock in the negotiations and more so about the fact an agreement on the present proposals would not respond to the development needs of developing countries, in particular the most agriculture dependent and vulnerable. The economies of developing countries which are largely agriculture-based and their rural farmers are confronted by major challenges as they relate to subsidies and other trade-distorting measures, high tariff peaks in developed country markets, non-tariff and technical barriers, scant regard for special and differential treatment, loss of markets and longstanding preferential arrangements, all of which have severely restricted the access of developing countries to the markets of developed economies. At

the same time developing countries, in particular their rural farmers, continue to face steep competition from imports of subsidized agricultural produce from developed countries.

Madam Chair,

15. This in part explains the World Bank's Development Report 2006, referenced in the Secretary General's report, that "most of the food insecure live in rural areas where food is produced, yet they are net food buyers rather than food sellers". That condition has to be addressed through facilitative global food policy. To that end, the early completion of the Doha round negotiations with the fullest accommodation of the development dimension is critical.

16. The G77 also laments the drastic reduction in financial and technical support for agriculture in light of the importance of research into appropriate and climate sensitive technology, new adaptable varieties, and cropping and production systems to cope with the current challenges. Without the requisite technological innovations and applications agricultural production will not register the needed increase. In this regard, we call for urgent reversal of the current downward trend in terms of resource flows to the sector including official development assistance. Grants, non-concessional loans and other incentives for investing in agriculture should again be critical components in the strategies of developing countries to achieve sustained economic growth, development and the MDGs.

17. International development orthodoxy must be modified to not only permit but to encourage and facilitate this. The United Nations system is urged to provide practical support to developing countries in agricultural diversification, alternative uses for crops, improved husbandry, irrigation and water management, aquaculture, the use of appropriate modern technologies for smallholder agriculture including agricultural extension services.

Madam Chair,

18. The importance of water to the agriculture sector is undeniable. Improvement in the use of water resources in agricultural activities through traditional or new technologies would serve to enhance agricultural productivity. Conservation and sustainable use of natural resources will help to protect water resources and soil over the long-term.

19. Strategies should be put in place to minimise loss and wastes of agricultural products at the time of harvest and transportation to the target market as part of the overall efforts to enhance food security, increase the earnings of farmers and consequently to alleviate poverty and hunger.

20. We reiterate that fundamental changes in the way societies produce and consume are indispensable for achieving global sustainable development. In this regard, all countries should promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, with the developed countries taking the lead for the benefit of all countries, taking into account the Rio principles, particularly the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Madam Chair,

Finally, and drawing on the statements of the panelists, the international community needs to address urgently:

- The growing inequity in income distribution;
- Mal-distribution of the food being produced;
- Market failures;

- Re-education and a return to some traditional system of production; and
- The nature of international policy advice.

I thank you, Madam Chair.