



STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. JOHN W. ASHE, AMBASSADOR/PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UN, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, AT THE OPENING OF THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (CSD-16): THE WAY FORWARD (New York, 14 May 2008)

Mr. Chairman;
Honourable Ministers;
H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General;
Distinguished Delegates and representatives;

1. I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman;

2. The Group accords high importance to the implementation of the outcomes of the major UN Conferences related to economic and social fields, including Agenda 21 and JPOI. We believe that the discussions of CSD on various thematic issues will highly contribute to the achievement of Agenda 21 and the internationally-agreed development goals, including the MDGs, by 2015. Based on the multi-year programme of work of CSD, addressing the gaps and constraints in implementation on Agenda 21 and JPOI is critical in order to identify the way forward.

3. The Group also attaches great importance to the consideration of the thematic issues in the agenda of CSD in the context of the three pillars of sustainable development, which include economic development, social development and environmental protection. The three pillars are mutually reinforcing and inter-related and they must be considered in an integrated manner.

4. The themes for this year's review session - agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification, and Africa - assume great relevance, perhaps unforeseen at the time of setting the Commission's multi-year programme of work back in 2003, when we consider the current global context. At once we are faced with a global food crisis; international financial and monetary crisis; unprecedented climate change; deadlocked trade negotiations in the WTO; and declines in ODA. The confluence of these factors will test the resolve of the international community and further challenge national governments in their effort to implement their sustainable development plans.

Mr. Chairman;

5. The Group reaffirms its commitment to the Rio Principles, which are particularly relevant in the present context of mounting challenges to sustainable development. The Group reiterates that, for developing countries as a whole, the means to implement sustainable development plans and strategies are of utmost priority. Without the means of implementation, sustainable development plans and strategies will remain scarcely more than words on a page.

6. Therefore, for us to move forward, it is necessary to once again draw the attention of the international community to the severely inadequate progress achieved with regard to the means of implementation - trade, finance, technology transfer, capacity building, education, scientific research. The way forward must include concerted efforts to close the implementation gap in this

regard.

7. Rural development, land management and agricultural development are crucial in all countries, particularly in developing countries. Land degradation and desertification continue to pose serious threats to the national efforts of developing countries to achieve development goals, including protecting the environment. We believe the international community, through appropriate mechanisms such as UNCCD and GEF, should intensify its support to developing countries in rural areas, sustainable management of lands, development of agriculture, adaptation to drought, and combating desertification and land degradation.

Mr. Chairman;

8. Recent developments may have altered the geography of trade as the contribution of the South has increased. However, globalization and the evolution of technology have made asymmetries more pronounced, marginalizing in particular rural communities in Africa, and other developing countries that are heavily dependent on the agriculture sector, and raising tension over scarce land resources; increasing land-use stresses, and contributing to drought and desertification. The way forward must include addressing these systemic external factors in a fundamental way.

Mr. Chairman;

9. It is rather ironic that while we attempt to find solutions to the challenges assailing sustainable development of developing countries, the current Doha Round of negotiations is stalled primarily over the issue of agriculture, as if we are oblivious to the potential that trade holds for agriculture, development in Africa, and rural development. In this regard improved access to the markets of developed countries must be accompanied by capacity building and technology transfer aimed at increasing productivity and competitiveness.

Mr. Chairman;

10. Continued action at the national level by way of domestic reforms have included integrating sustainable development into national development plans and strategies, emphasizing the three pillars of sustainable development. This has resulted in progress in some regions and sectors. The reforms undertaken by countries at the national level aimed at improving governance to create an enabling environment now more than ever require further support to maintain the momentum. These efforts need to be matched with a series of vital fundamental changes in the international system.

Mr. Chairman;

11. The sustainable development challenges and constraints vary tremendously from country to country. However all developing countries face the same challenges and constraints in the international environment. They were recognized and identified in Agenda 21, JPOI, Monterrey, and at other major UN conferences and summits - trade, finance, technology and capacity building support, scientific research and development.

12. Actions at the international level focusing on technology transfer and dissemination/diffusion to improve agriculture productivity; capacity building support to create and increase competitiveness in Africa and in rural communities across the developing world; capacity building to support export diversification in the agriculture sector; economic diversification, are all called for in JPOI and remain lacking today. Adaptation to climate change; drought management and combating desertification; sustainable land-use and land management practices all require technologies which

should be made much more accessible and affordable to developing countries.

13. In conclusion Mr. Chairman; it is no secret that implementation has been the Achilles heel of the global development agenda. Ironically, the implementation of what has already been agreed to globally remains the biggest challenge to sustainable development. The CSD remains the only inter-governmental forum to review Agenda 21 and advance progress since WSSD at a high political level on a regular basis. The Group underscores the importance of the Commission's multi-year programme of work. The Group encourages future dynamic work programmes of the Commission to ensure it remains seized of where progress is lacking; identify the gaps in implementation; address persistent systemic constraints; identify new challenges, and facilitate the sharing of best practices and lessons learnt - with a view to enable effective response at all levels.

Thank you.