

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY H.E. AMBASSADOR DAUDI N. MWAKAWAGO, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77, AT THE 10 TH SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE FOR THE ELABORATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION IN THOSE COUNTRIES EXPERIENCING SERIOUS DROUGHT AND/OR DESERTIFICATION, PARTICULARLY IN AFRICA

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Mr. Chairman,

I am grateful for the opportunity of taking the floor under your chairmanship for the first time in my capacity as Chairman of the Group of 77. I am glad also that my first statement should take place in the context of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa. Your dedication to the challenging mission entrusted to you and your enthusiasm about the possibility of a significant breakthrough in international cooperation in this important area in the life of so many nations is well known, and I can assure you of the full commitment of the G-77 and China to contribute to the success of this great undertaking.

I also take pleasure in welcoming at your side a dynamic bureau and an effective secretariat led by Mr. Arba Diallo, which led to the fortunate outcomes which we are all welcoming today.

I take the floor today after 9<sup>th</sup> substantive sessions held by the Committee. I would like to highlight the work of the two working groups that have made progress in the negotiations by building on the common concerns felt in the face of the dangers of desertification and the effects of drought.

Mr. Chairman,

As far back as the preparatory stage of the Rio de Janeiro conference, the international community steered into action by the growing scale of the phenomenon of desertification and its disquieting impact on the affected countries, agreed to treat this problem as a global phenomenon calling for universal mobilization. For this reason, resolution 44/228 of the General Assembly and chapter 12 of Agenda 21 placed it among the nine questions of greatest importance for the preservation of the quality of the earth's environment, and especially for ecologically sound and sustainable development in all countries. General Assembly resolution 47/188 once again reaffirmed priority to be given to combating desertification.

The outstanding political will shown by the various parties since the first session of the Committee is a valuable asset on the basis of which we should now launch our enterprise of implementation of commitments entered into. In this regard, it is obvious that the test of the credibility of the partnership established by this Convention is, to a large extent, to be found in the mobilization of sufficient financial resources, new and additional funding and transfer of ecologically sound technologies for the benefit of developing countries.

The establishment of a global mechanism provided for in the provisions of the Convention will, from this standpoint, be an important first step towards taking adequate measures to combat desertification. We must also go immediately into action to ensure that this Convention does not ape the sad face of the Nairobi Programme of Action.

Mr. Chairman,

As we reiterated our position since the first session of the Committee, the desertification problem is a global environmental phenomenon on an equal footing with the problems affecting the ozone layer and climate change. The Convention to combat desertification cannot therefore be demoted to a second-class international legal instrument by comparison with the Convention on Climate Change and Biodiversity.

Therefore, the global mechanism of this Convention should receive equal interests and given the same attention and priority as the international conventions signed at Rio de Janeiro. The Committee should also formulate concrete recommendations to the conference of the parties regarding the mobilization of substantive new and additional resources within the global mechanism and the transfer of technology if it is really to become an effective operational instrument which will halt and reverse the phenomenon of desertification.

It is important also to mention that the Secretariat of the negotiating Committee should enjoy the full support of all member states. In this respect we regard it as essential that the budgetary funds be allocated to the Committee and that all Governments increase their financial contributions to the executive secretariat in order to enable all developing countries to take a full and effective part in the first session of the conference of the parties of the convention scheduled to take place in Rome from 29 September to 10 October 1997.

Mr. Chairman,

If the phenomenon of desertification spares no continent, it is especially in Africa that it has reached the greatest impact. In fact, in Africa, 60% of whose land is arid or semi-arid, more than half of its area suffers from a lack of rainfall the persistence of which has encouraged the encroachment of the desert, thereby threatening the existence of almost 200 million human beings and making extremely difficult and costly any effort to protect and restore the soil.

Today the desertification is affecting more than 40 countries on the African continent, and has been swallowing up every year approximately 6 million hectares and making totally sterile their productive capacity. Today, a hope is reborn with the promise of this Convention. It is important that the international consensus for specific measures of assistance to all developing countries produce as quickly as possible full effects so that the affected countries might be able to play a pioneering role in the strategy of the response of the international community to the challenge of desertification.

Mr. Chairman,

To conclude, I would like to say that above and beyond the important legal and technical aspects of the negotiations which will take place during these two weeks, I hardly need to stress the highly political significance that we attach to this process, and our hope and expectation that it will conclude successfully within the deadline set by the General Assembly.

I wish all success and positive outcome to our deliberations.

I thank you.