



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY THE DELEGATION OF SOUTH AFRICA AT THE OPENING OF THE TWELFTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF PARTIES TO THE UN CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (Ankara, Turkey, 12 October 2015)**

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start my remarks by expressing sincere condolences to the Government and the people of the Republic of Turkey and register our collective condemnation of the brutal acts of terrorism against innocent civilians which took place two days ago.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Allow me first to express the Group's congratulation to you for your appointment as the President of the 12th Session of the COP. We also take this opportunity and thank the Government and People of Turkey for hosting this Conference and the hospitality extended to all of us since our arrival in the country. On behalf of the Group, let me also pay tribute to the Executive Secretary, Ms Monique Barbut, for her leadership and dedication since she has been at the helm of the Secretariat of the Convention. The Group of G77 and China came to Ankara with a positive spirit, and I can assure you, Mr President, of our support and readiness to contribute to the positive outcome of this conference.

Mr President,

The Group of 77 and China attaches the utmost importance to the challenges of desertification, land degradation, drought and dust storms. As you may recall, the Group served as the backbone for the establishment of the UNCCD in Rio 23 years ago and has always been at the forefront in all developments related to the Convention. In the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, an outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) at Rio+10, the Group was able to agree with its development partners that acknowledged the Convention as a prime tool for poverty eradication and that the geography of poverty coincides with that of degraded lands. More important, the Group obtained an agreement with its partners to avail the Global Environment Facility to serve as the Convention's financial mechanism. With this important role for the GEF, our countries are now relying on predictable and substantive financial resources to fund the implementation of the Convention.

In addition to the above developments, the Group is particularly encouraged by the prominence given to Desertification, Land degradation, Drought (DLDD) and dust storms in the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At last, the international community has realized that for any development to be sustainable, it must invest resources that focus on addressing DLDD issues, and dust storms which was not the case in the MDGs. There is a need to pay great attention to our fundamental resource base, namely, land - as desertification, land degradation and drought represent a serious concern for developing countries. As the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77 and China noted at their annual meeting in New York in September last year, desertification, land degradation and drought corrode the three dimensions of sustainable development. In this respect, they ascertained that addressing DLDD and dust storms enables countries to deal with several global policy challenges such as food security, loss of biodiversity, forest, wetlands, adaptation to climate change, and forced migration. This last aspect was further highlighted by the UN General Assembly last year. In its Resolution 69/221, the General Assembly noted that combating land degradation, desertification, drought and dust storms,

including through sustainable land management, can ease forced migration flows influenced by a number of factors, including economic, social, security and environmental concerns, which can in turn reduce the current and potential conflict over resources in degraded areas. This aspect is of particular concern for the Group, also because the nexus between DLDD issues and political instability is still overlooked, especially in Africa and the Middle East.

Mr President,

At their annual meeting last year, G77 Ministers also stressed that sustainable development goals and targets on DLDD should address the drivers of DLDD. The Group is happy that the international community heeded this call.

We are happy that DLDD and dust storms issues are now part and parcel of the SDGs and there is a specific target that strives to achieve a land degradation neutral world by 2030. The Group welcomes this milestone, which will be a game-changer if implemented effectively. In fact, this is the first time the Convention has a basis to operate under the realm of measurability. With the land degradation neutrality target included in the target, we have a useful tool to assess whether we are making progress in the way we address land degradation. The Group had introduced the concept of land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development at the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, and it was retained in the **Future We Want**. With its adoption as part of a sustainable development target, we are confident that its achievement will impact positively on the livelihood of affected populations and improve the conditions of ecosystems.

This development also responds to Resolution 69/221, which expressed concern about the fact that currently land degradation, including desertification, affects nearly 2 billion hectares of land, with many regions experiencing more frequent, prolonged periods of drought or flooding, leading to the loss of fertile topsoil through erosion. As land becomes degraded, it loses the capacity to support livelihoods, which may influence communities to seek out other arable land, including forests and wetlands. Rightly so, the General Assembly noted that degraded land, if recovered, would, inter alia, contribute to restoring natural resources, thus potentially improving food security and nutrition in the affected countries and communities, and in the process could also contribute to the absorption of carbon emissions.

If dealt with appropriately and comprehensively, achieving land degradation neutrality will contribute to achieving other sustainable goals ranging from food security, poverty, health, climate change, biodiversity, to name a few. The Group of 77 and China is therefore ready to have this COP endorse the General Assembly resolution on the SDGs and its land degradation 15.3 target. The Group also commends the work done by the Intergovernmental Working group on this matter and will endorse it when it comes up with a COP decision on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mr President,

The Group of 77 and China would like to express its satisfaction to the COP organizers for having devoted one of the high-level interactive roundtables to the issue of drought. Even if drought is not a **charismatic** disaster, which exact a sudden heavy toll on affected populations, it is insidious and a slow killer. So far the approach of the international community to drought has been largely reactive, with post-impact interventions and relief measures in the form of emergency assistance programs aimed at providing funding or other specific types of assistance such as food, livestock feed or water to those experiencing the most severe impacts. It is the hope of the Group that the discussion should focus on the urgent need to design mechanisms to increase the resilience

against drought at local and international levels, and the importance of having drought policies in all drought-prone regions.

On other issues on the COP agenda, the Group is ready for constructive discussions and to contribute to COP decisions that will advance the implementation of this important Convention. Especially because the Convention can from now on, with its sustainable development target, present itself as a cost-effective and efficient instrument to address several challenges, including climate adaptation and mitigation, as well as the necessary reforms to make the UNCCD institutions as efficient as possible.

By drawing on past experience, I expect that the COP will be able to formulate appropriate mechanisms to give added vitality to the Convention. We believe that addressing these challenges and common objectives should be facilitated by more ambitious, fully inclusive and non-discriminatory provision of means of implementation, particularly finance and transfer of technology and associated knowledge towards achieving meaningful global partnership.

With the UNFCCC COP21 taking place in Paris next month, our discussions here must send a strong message on the need to upscale land-based approaches to fighting climate change.

I would like to end this statement by reiterating the Group's appreciation to the host country for all its efforts in sharing its experience in its successful fight against desertification, and to have availed these superb facilities to enable Parties to carry out their meeting obligations.

Thank you.