

STATEMENT BY MS. ALISON DRAYTON OF THE GUYANA DELEGATION ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTER-SESSIONAL AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON OCEANS AND SEAS AND ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES ON AGENDA ITEM 3: OCEANS AND SEAS

New York, 1 March 1999

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China welcomes the brief report of the Secretariat on the outcome of the First Intergovernmental Meeting of Experts on El Nino, held in November 1998 and looks forward to the final report.

During 1997-1998, the El Nino phenomenon had its strongest impact on record on the sustainable development of many developing countries in different regions of the world. The Group of 77 & China attaches great importance to the full implementation of resolutions 52/200 and 53/185. In this context, the Group supports the convening of meetings on this issue in Chile and Peru later this year.

Mr. Chairman,

The Report of the Secretary-General on Oceans and Seas contains a wealth of useful detail and the Secretariat is to be commended for their efforts.

While the Report is fairly comprehensive, the Group of 77 & China regrets that it overlooks the fact that marine resources are a critical source of food security for many coastal and island developing States. We wish to underscore the importance of this issue and to see it reflected in the decisions of CSD-7.

The Group of 77 and China believes that the working-group should not depart from the framework provided by Chapter 17 of Agenda 21 when dealing with all aspects of marine environments and its related issues, for which the overall legal framework is provided by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

We are also disturbed by the continued references in the text to the problem of overfishing and excess fishing capacity without a corresponding distinction of the relative roles and responsibilities of industrialized and developing countries as well as the regional differences of fisheries stocks. It is very clear that the implementation of Agenda 21 on this, as indeed on all of its chapters, must proceed in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

It is clear, from the best information available to us that overfishing is primarily a crisis caused by industrialized fleets. The Group of 77 and China is especially concerned by the growth of illegal, unregulated and unauthorized fisheries, particularly by vessels flying "flags of convenience." One of the very negative effects of these practices is the encroachment on the fishery resources of coastal and island developing States by distant fishing fleets. Not only there is there a failure to show the proper respect for the legal measures of the various regions but, more importantly, this practice contributes to a significant loss of revenue and resources and, in some cases, of livelihood for many peoples who are dependent on these resources for their daily subsistence.

There is therefore an urgent need for measures and actions to reduce and eliminate wasteful fishing practices,

especially those of industrialized fleets. In this regard, we note that the FAO Committee on Fisheries last week adopted an international plan of action on the management of fishing capacity and we call on developed States fully commit to the implementation of this important new instrument. Implementation of these programmes should take into account the social and economic impact of these practices on the livelihood of those peoples whose natural resources are being denuded. It should also be borne in mind that since these activities often take place in the high seas, it is the responsibility of the international community to take effective preventative action.

Mr. Chairman,

It is also a matter of some concern that, despite the negotiation in good faith of access agreements between coastal and island developing States and distant fishing fleets, these agreements are generally honored more in the breach. Not only should distant water fishing nations respect their obligations under access agreements, they should also provide the necessary support to coastal and island developing States to assist them to more effectively protect their valuable marine resources.

I wish to draw attention to another critical issue of concern to developing countries, namely the prevalence of subsidies which encourage the development of distant water fishing fleets beyond the carrying capacity of our stocks. The latest FAO figures show that more financial resources are sunk into fishing activities than revenues generated. This situation is unsustainable and hurts the coastal and island developing States the most. Unsustainable subsidies extended to augment the already excessive fishing capacity of distant water fishing fleets adversely impact on the sustainable livelihoods of the poor coastal and marine communities of our countries.

Attention also needs to be paid to enhancing the capacity of coastal and island developing communities of developing countries to sustainably exploit their marine resources. These communities already suffer under adverse conditions and need to be supported in their efforts for enhancing the catch and provision of adequate returns from their small scale artisanal subsistence fisheries. In this regard, we urge that developing countries be given the requisite technical and financial assistance to enable them to maximize the potential of new technologies.

The other major impact on the marine environment of coastal developing States is pollution resulting from land-based activities. While some progress has been achieved with the adoption of the Global Programme of Action, we must note that the necessary financial resources for its implementation are not forthcoming. Beyond the adoption of this programme, serious attention needs to be paid to the issue of implementation if the GPA is to be of any value to the international community. We are concerned that without appropriate assistance, particularly to developing countries, the objectives of the GPA will not be achieved. We therefore urge that serious attention be given to devising ways and means of operationalizing it, including through the provision of additional external resources to enhance capacity-building in developing countries.

Mr. Chairman, we do well to remind ourselves that oceans and marine living resources are a resource shared by all peoples, both in developed and developing countries. Their conservation, management and sustainable utilization are our collective responsibility and can only be achieved through meaningful cooperation.

Before concluding, Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw your attention to the non-paper just distributed by the Secretariat, containing the proposals of the Group of 77 and China to be included in the possible elements for a draft decision.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.