

STATEMENT BY MR. OSITADINMA ANAEDU OF NIGERIA, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTERSESSIONAL AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON INTEGRATED PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF LAND RESOURCES

New York, 29 February 2000

Mr. Co-Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China wants to congratulate you and your fellow co-chairman for your election, which is an expression of implicit confidence by the delegations in your ability to lead this meeting to successful conclusions. The Group also commends the Secretariat for the comprehensive report and background document it produced on integrated planning and management of land resources. While recognizing the constraints of the Secretariat, the Group would want these reports and documents to be produced and circulated to delegates early enough, in order to enable them to receive required reactions from their capitals.

The Group is at pains to note that the Secretary-General's report focused more on national activities while ignoring totally the international dimension of sustainable land development. The reports directed more attention towards technical problems on land management which are obvious, but said little or nothing on what should be done to solve these problems. It placed squarely the burden of implementing proposals on sustainable land development on national governments. The level of international cooperation required to complement domestic national agenda was totally absent. The reality, the Group wonders, is where in fact is the implementation of Agenda 21 and programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21? Where, for goodness' sake, are the issues of capacity building and transfer of technology?

The Group is concerned that the Secretariat is once again promoting Euro-centric concepts or ideas as worldwide accepted consensus on integrated planning and management of land resources. The problem, the Group wonders, goes deep on who prepares the documents – that essentially place the burden of sustainable development of land on developing countries and introduces new concepts in such a way to give credence to them as being generally accepted. The idea of criteria and indicators as a means of sustainable land development, which is widely in use in ongoing Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) projects, as indicated in paragraph 25 of the report, seems to portray a general consensus in its application. The Group notes that the preparatory meetings surrounding the concepts were at expert level and therefore had no blessing of intergovernmental process. While we are open to the further study of this concept, we believe that its introduction should not constitute or be used as a condition for trade barriers to developing countries.

The Group is of the view that paragraph 72 of the Secretary-General's report goes in contradiction to the programme of action of Agenda 21 by limiting the role of international cooperation to only exchange of information and experience in planning and management of land resources among governments and people. As indicated in programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21, paragraph 76, the financing for the implementation of Agenda 21 while generally recognized as coming from a country's own public and private

sectors, provides the developing countries with a channel of external funding through official development assistance (ODA) as well as substantial new and additional funding for sustainable development and implementation of Agenda 21. Hence, all financial commitment of Agenda 21 particularly those contained in chapter 33 and the provision of new and additional resources are expected to be both adequate and predictable. The international dimension of integrated planning and management of land is not in any way limited by the fact that land is a fixed resource relative to climate, marine resources and biodiversity. The idea here, is the uses of land resources which are universal in character and subject to adverse economic instruments and lack of adequate financial and technical assistance. We should go further in exchange of information and knowledge by utilizing the latest technology, such as information technology to advance sustainable land development.

The Group regrets that this outlook of external funding, including ODA, has not materialized. It should be noted that even before the recent financial crisis, official development assistance was already falling steeply. It was only aggravated by the financial crisis. For developing countries, particularly as indicated in paragraph 77 of programme of the further implementation of Agenda 21, especially those in Africa and Least Developed Countries, ODA remains the main source of external funding and cannot be replaced by private capital flows. It is essential to note that while capital flows is expected to complement ODA, it is in itself a short-term capital investment and highly lopsided in its distribution among developing countries. It therefore could not, in spite of its increasing level, replace any global funding for sustainable land development. Therefore, the obstacles of implementation of Agenda 21, as indicated in paragraph 55 of the report, could only be categorized into: enabling environment which constitutes (a, b, c) of paragraph 55 of the report, and (d) - lack of financial and technological means, human resources and skills. The challenge for the United Nations system and other international and bilateral development organizations is how to strengthen and support the national efforts.

The Group recognizes the importance of improving domestic policies including land tenure institutions in developing countries to facilitate sustainable land development. However, it should be observed that land tenure has cultural expression. It must be recognized that land ownership in developing countries is governed by culture and tradition. The issue is also both social and economic. Any meaningful proposal on land tenure reform would center on making traditional owners to be active participants in the development of their land and not just beneficiaries. The Group is strongly of the view that prioritization of economic over social and environmental goals should not be in conflict as indicated in paragraph 30 of the report. These are basic dimensions of development which should be pursued jointly for sustainable development.

The Group observes that while paragraph 58 indicated the mixed results arising from trade liberalization, only its bad side was provided. Liberalization in itself, the Group recognizes, is not the problem but the instruments used in implementing trade policies that cause declining prices for agricultural products, debt crisis, frequent fluctuation in exchange rates that together, among others, have direct and indirect effects on land resources.

Mr. Co-Chairman,

The Group is puzzled that so far the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification has been all but ignored as a vital instrument of integrated planning and management of land resources. It is surprising that the only Convention meant to redress the degradation of land in developing countries has received practically no substantial financial

support from the international community relative to the other environmental conventions. This should be redressed if the international community is serious on sustainable land development. It is important that the provisions of this Convention, including forest rehabilitation, should be implemented with adequate financial backing in the model of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF).

In the final analysis, Mr. Co-Chairman, the issue of integrated land management would not be effectively addressed without the eradication of poverty and its devastating impact on land and its resources. Poverty is a consequence of land degradation as well as one of the causes of land degradation itself. To address this problem requires concerted efforts by the international community to channel resources from both existing and new and additional resources, including the resolution of staggering debt overhang of developing countries as well as dealing with the critical issues of transfer of technology and capacity building and training.

I thank you.