

STATEMENT BY DR. IMEH OKOPIDO, HONOURABLE MINISTER OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, AT THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (UNCCD)

Bonn, Germany, 11 December 2000

Mr. President,
Executive Secretary,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I wish to congratulate you and the Bureau on your election. I am confident that your vast experience and commitment to global agenda for the protection of the environment will provide this conference the inspiring leadership to reach a successful conclusion. Let me assure you, Mr. President, of the full cooperation of the Group of 77 and China in negotiations that will enable us resolve all issues and challenges before the conference.

I also wish to thank the outgoing President of the Conference of Parties (COP), Mr. Jose Sarnei Filho, the Honourable Minister of Environment of Brazil, and the bureau of third session of the COP for their leadership and the able manner with which they conducted the proceedings of the Conference of Parties throughout their tenure.

We thank the Executive Secretary of UNCCD, Ambassador Hama Arba Diallo, and the secretariat of the Convention for their hard work and total commitment in raising awareness of the international community to the threat of desertification and in mobilizing support to attain the objectives of the Convention. We recognize his commendable efforts in dealing with the daily direction of the Secretariat as well as the drive on how to make the Convention a concrete tool at the disposal of international community to positively change the livelihoods of millions of people affected by desertification and recurrent droughts. He deserves our full support and appreciation. We also appreciate the content of the reports which give detailed highlights of the current efforts of the developing and developed countries in addressing the problem of desertification.

I wish to use this opportunity to express our profound appreciation to the government and peoples of the Federal Republic of Germany for the important role it is playing in hosting the permanent secretariat of the Convention. I commend the Mayor and the people of the city of Bonn for their hospitality and facilities extended to all of us.

Mr. President,

Six years after the entry into force of this Convention, we must admit that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa (UNCCD) has failed to support tangible efforts of developing countries in their attempt to arrest the sweeping pace of desertification and its devastating impact. The Group of 77 is concerned with limited progress made in the implementation of the Convention with regard to capacity-building, transfer of technology and mobilization of predictable financial resources. It is evident that this process is lacking the support enjoyed by other UNCED-related conventions, in terms of financial assistance from the international community for its timely and effective implementation. The UNCCD, regrettably, is presently the only major UNCED-related convention on environment without a funding mechanism.

In this context, it has become clear that the international community misjudged the importance of the issues at stake when it decided not to grant the Convention direct access to Global Environment Facility (GEF). This must be redressed. GEF project base should be expanded to accommodate projects and programmes on desertification in developing countries. The Group welcomes the decision of the GEF Council at its last meeting in November 2000, to request the Chief Executive Officer of the GEF to

explore the best options for enhancing the support of the Facility in assisting affected countries, especially those in Africa, in implementing the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, taking into account the third replenishment. We call upon donor countries to make substantial increase in their contributions in that regard.

With the conclusion of the negotiations of the Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) which will have GEF as its financial mechanism, the time has come to conclusively and explicitly apply the same for the UNCCD. The Group of 77 and China formally requests that when the GEF instrument will be opened to accommodate the POPs convention, the UNCCD should be included likewise. I recall that this has been the condition upon which the Group of 77 and China agreed to support the GEF as the financial mechanism for POPs last weekend in Johannesburg.

Mr. President,

The Group recognizes the importance of partnership as envisaged in the implementation of the Convention. We urge the enhancement of the work of the Global Mechanism, established under the Convention as the financial source to implement the Convention by the Parties themselves and to facilitate such partnerships. We remain steadfast in support of the Global Mechanism to fulfill this mandate, in identifying possible partnership schemes and arrangements. As an important mechanism of the Convention, we acknowledge the key role that it could play in supporting activities of the Convention and the Secretariat. We however recognize the limitation of the Global Mechanism to mobilize required financial resources to carry out its mandate under the Convention.

The Group is encouraged by the partnership between the institutions members of the Facilitation Committee. We recognize that such partnerships have great potentials to increase project activities at the country and sub-regional levels in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. It would be necessary that this arrangement and cooperation be further developed for the benefit of affected countries. We accept the reality that the problem of desertification is very broad and therefore requires enormous resources as well as economic and social approach to combat it. It is essential that a wide variety of financial mechanisms need to be put in place for effective implementation.

Mr. President,

The Group of 77 welcomes the decision by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Executive Board to support fully the implementation of the Convention and its regional annexes. The decision by the Executive Board to strengthen the cooperation between the Secretariat of the Convention and the Administration of the UNDP with a view to mainstreaming activities to combat desertification at the national, sub-regional and regional levels constitutes a clear indication on emerging consensus on how to strengthen cooperation among relevant bodies and agencies of the United Nations and other international organizations. We also call on UNDP to establish a partnership with the Global Mechanism with a view to mobilizing new and additional resources that will secure the implementation of projects.

The G-77 on its part has facilitated the implementation of desertification projects through the Perez-Guerrero Trust Fund for ECDC/TCDC (PGTF). Over the last two years the PGTF provided support to a number of projects submitted through the secretariat of the Convention on behalf of affected developing countries. The PGTF is willing to undertake co-financing with the Global Mechanism activities on a series of similar projects.

The Group welcomes the outcome of the regional meetings held recently in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, which highlighted the need for strong political commitment at the highest level from developing and developed countries to further the implementation of the Convention.

Mr. President,

We are aware that the lack of financial resources has placed enormous burden on developing country parties in the preparation of their country reports. An example of this situation was provided by the reporting process in which the African country parties engaged within the framework of the third session of the COP, prepared and submitted 40 reports without any support from the implementation

process. Also in the final preparations for the fourth session of the Conference of Parties, countries from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean have submitted their national, sub-regional and regional reports, regrettably without much support. We however commend the UNCCD secretariat for its efforts in raising funds to support country reports even though the amount is often less than what is required to cover the needs of developing country parties. It is disappointing that the resources available for the elaboration of these reports through the Trust Fund of the Secretariat have diminished. This situation cannot continue without seriously hampering the implementation of the Convention.

The Group believes that the review and consideration of national reports is of paramount importance for the implementation of the Convention. It is important to establish an institutional structure to monitor and enhance the implementation of the Convention. We have to agree on a declaration of renewed and strengthened commitment that embodies a time frame and measurable results. In this regard, the Group emphasizes the need that the Committee on Science and Technology should be enabled to play its role fully as defined in the Convention. The Group of 77 is ready to consider how to revitalize the work of this important subsidiary organ.

Mr. President,

In the view of the Group of 77, the preparation for the review of progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development scheduled to hold in South Africa in 2002 at summit level, represents an opportunity for the COP to assess and identify major constraints hindering the implementation of Agenda 21 in respect of desertification. The COP should propose specific time-bound measures and options to be undertaken, including institutional and financial requirements therein to the summit and its preparatory review process. The COP should also endeavor to provide a report on the status of the implementation of the Convention to the review process.

Mr. President,

The priority in combating desertification should centre on the implementation of preventive measures for lands that are not yet degraded, or which are only slightly degraded. For the severely degraded areas, consistent programme for rehabilitation should be mapped out at local, national and regional levels. It is important that in combating desertification and drought, the participation of local communities, rural organizations, national governments, non-governmental organizations and international and regional organizations should be mobilized. The Group emphasizes the need to strengthen the knowledge base and development of information and monitoring systems for regions prone to drought and desertification, including economic and social aspects of the ecosystem. We expect the dire need for the installation of early warning system for disasters caused by desertification and drought. It is also crucial that comprehensive anti-desertification programmes should be integrated into international development programmes.

We particularly want progress in the area of development and transfer of technology that will undertake and update existing inventories of national resources such as energy, water, soil, minerals, plant and animal access for food as well as demographic distribution. It is also important that the capacity-building of national and local institutions be strengthened by providing them the necessary tools and equipment and finance for assessing desertification.

In conclusion, Mr. President, this COP has a duty at the beginning of the new millennium to implement the mandates of our Heads of State and Government in the Millennium Declaration adopted at the UN General in September 2000, which articulated concrete steps to effectively address the issue of poverty. Now is the time to concretize these declarations and the UNCCD, in doing so, contributes substantially to the drought and desertification control as well as the agenda for poverty eradication. Our Group is committed to achieve these positive results.