



STATEMENT BY MR. MOHAMMED ARROUCHI, COUNSELLOR, ON BEHALF OF THE G77 AND CHINA, AT THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION - (HAVANA, SEPTEMBER 1st, 2003)

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

On behalf of the G77 and China, I would like to thank the Government and people of Cuba for their hospitality and for hosting the Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties.

Mr. President,

The process of desertification as a global and complex phenomenon is one of the major obstacles hindering the attainment of sustainable development goals and targets, mainly poverty eradication, which the WSSD recognized as "the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development particularly for developing countries". This is the language we have unanimously and enthusiastically agreed on in Johannesburg.

The challenge we are facing now is how to ensure that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification particularly in Africa, becomes an effective tool in halting the ongoing spread of this phenomenon and in reversing it to generate the environment, our common natural heritage.

We note with great concern that in the absence of long-term strategies and reliable means of implementation (adequate financial resources, transfer of sound technologies and capacity-building measures) the global phenomenon of desertification is increasing in scope and severity and continues to have serious adverse impact on a large portion of the world population, which is more than 1 billion.

Indeed, during the first session of the Conference of the Parties in Rome, six years ago, in 1997, 130 million hectares worldwide were already lost forever, which represents the equivalent of the land of France, Italy and Spain combined together. These 130 million hectares can no longer be used for food production. The economic impact of desertification is horrendous, with a loss of more than \$ 40 billions per year in agricultural goods and an increase in agricultural prices.

Desertification creates conditions that intensify wildfires and stirring winds, adding to the tremendous pressure to the earth's most precious resource, water and all that depends on it.

Consequently an immediate action is critically needed, at all levels, to halt and reverse this phenomenon which threatens our well-being. Immediate action implies the development of long-term integrated strategies together with a verifiable process of implementation leading to the attainment of the objectives of our Convention, taking into account the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

The development of these strategies should take into account inter alia:

" The development at the national and local level, of observational databases with the aim to establish a comprehensive approach towards completion of a new global assessment of the obscure process of desertification.

This database should be widely diffused and shared. The role of the Committee on Science and Technology in this regard is of paramount importance.

" The adoption of an ascending approach in the policy-making processes in order to ensure the participation of the local communities and populations.

" Establishment of durable and accountable partnerships between all actors (Governments, NGOs, local communities, etc.), particularly where the problem of desertification is mostly felt.

Mr. President,

The key to success in the battle against desertification resides in the availability of adequate financing with total long-term commitment at the political level and at all levels of Government and societies.

It is important to recall in this context that the Plan of Implementation of the WSSD stated clearly that adequate and reliable financing is indispensable for the achievement of sustainable development goals.

The Plan emphasizes that "the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration and Agenda 21, as well as in the Plan of Action, will require significant increases in the flow of financial resources as elaborated in the Monterrey Consensus, including through new and additional financial resources, in particular to developing countries, to support the implementation of national policies and programs developed by them, improved trade opportunities, access to and transfer of environmentally sound technologies, education and awareness -raising, capacity-building and information for decision-making and scientific capabilities within the agreed time frame required to meet these goals and initiatives".

We welcome in this regard the designation of the Global Environment Facility as a new financial mechanism for enhancing the implementation of the Convention and we look forward to a similar effective contribution on the part of the Global Mechanism.

Mr. President,

South-South cooperation is another key element which can enhance the implementation of the Convention. In this respect, conscious of the importance of a reinforced South-South cooperation under a renewed form through, inter alia, regional and sub-regional cooperation and integration, the Kingdom of Morocco will, in accordance with the Havana Programme of Action, hold in Marrakech, during December 2003, a high-level Conference on South-South cooperation which will provide an opportunity for developing countries to explore ways and means to enhance the implementation process with regard to sustainable development goals, including in combating desertification.

The Moroccan Government is determined to make of this Conference which will take place at the mid-term of the next summit of the G77 and China in 2005, a productive and successful meeting and a starting point of a new era in South-South cooperation.

Mr. President,

The problem of desertification should be tackled together with other "real dangers" which pose a particular threat to population in the South, especially the alarming extension of poverty, the inability to contain the spread of epidemics and devastating diseases, the irreversible damage caused to the climate, to the environment and to biodiversity, and also the dwindling water resources. All these hazards warrant prompt implementation of the recommendations of Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, including in the domain of combating desertification. It should be recalled in this respect that the international Community will be given during the biennium 2008-2009 another opportunity to evaluate within the Commission on Sustainable Development the progress achieved in combating desertification.

Mr. President,

In order to avoid that millions of populations to sink in the sand, we are waiting from this high-level gathering to give clear cut indications with strong political will to this Conference in order to ensure that effective measures will be taken together enthusiastically to ensure the implementation of our Convention.

Once again, our sincere thanks to you, Mr. President, for having given the chance to the delegation of Morocco to voice the position of the G77 and China in this honorable gathering and thank you very much.