



STATEMENT BY CONRAD HUNTE, AMBASSADOR, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE PERMANENT MISSION OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UN, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, DURING THE THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS ON DESERTIFICATION AT THE SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (CSD-16) (New York, 7 May 2008)

1. Mr. Chairman, allow me first on behalf of the Group of 77 and China to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on desertification which is before us. At a time when most of the international attention is focused on Climate Change, the merit of the Secretary-General's report lies in its conclusion, namely that in the context of climate change, combating land degradation and desertification contributes heavily to adaptation and mitigation, and that therefore the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification constitutes an invaluable tool in this respect.
2. I would like also to mention that the review on desertification should not be dissociated from the consideration of the other thematic issues of the current implementation cycle, namely agriculture, rural development, land, drought and Africa, given that all issues should be addressed in an integrated manner.
3. Desertification poses serious threats to the achievement of sustainable development and to the eradication of poverty and hunger. It can set back all the efforts exerted towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs) including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Its adverse impacts affect mostly the poorest of the poor, depriving them from their land, the main source of their livelihood.
4. Desertification is mostly caused by human activities leading to land degradation, including over-cultivation, overgrazing, deforestation, and poor irrigation methods. These activities cause soil erosion, soil nutrient depletion, and contamination and salinization of soil, and are transforming our fertile ground into unproductive patches of degraded lands that are gradually joining together creating desert like conditions. Moreover, desertification mostly affects fragile ecosystems, including deserts.
5. Desertification is not a localized phenomena, rather it could adversely affect every country and every region of our planet. The crisis is even more acute in dry land which covers more than a third of the Earth's land surface. In Africa, over a billion hectares of land, amounting to 73 per cent of its drylands, are moderately to severely affected by desertification. In addition, land degradation is leading annually to the loss of more than 3 per cent of agriculture gross domestic product in sub-Saharan Africa.
6. Desertification is a severe problem for developing countries on a whole, particularly since it has far reaching social and economic implications. In fact, the United Nations Environment Programme estimates that desertification costs the world 42 billion dollars a year and that Africa alone is losing some 9 billion dollars a year. The human cost is even higher. The livelihood of more than a billion people, almost a fifth of the entire population of the globe, is now at risk. Desertification also contributes to the growth of urban slums.
7. Desertification makes the problem of poverty and hunger more pronounced, increases food

scarcity at a time when the world is facing a food crisis; it fuels conflicts and leads to migration. It impacts in a severely negative way on developmental efforts including in the field of agriculture, rural and urban development, land management and industrial development; contributing to the increase in internally displaced persons and internal and international migration.

8. Further, desertification contributes to the loss of biodiversity and thus undermines the efforts for the achievement of targets set by the CBD for 2010 to reverse biodiversity loss. It is a global problem that requires a global response through concerted efforts among all member states and concerned stakeholders.

9. Mr. Chairman, the international community has realized that desertification and land degradation cannot be tackled single-handedly. Through the UNCCD process, it is agreed that combating land degradation and desertification should be high among the priorities, given the role that the Convention plays as a tool in combating poverty and as an important platform in adapting to the adverse impacts of climate change. It has to be noted that the Convention is the only legally binding, universal agreement on land issues that systemically addresses land degradation and desertification.

10. The UNCCD offers a platform for adaptation, mitigation and resilience and can therefore reinforce the measures intended to address the adverse impacts of climate change and the loss of plant and animal biodiversity. As such, we support the enhancement of synergies between the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification.

11. Mr. Chairman, poverty, unsustainable land use practices, deforestation, poor irrigation methods, the inappropriate management of natural resources including water resources, the lack of access to advanced technologies and techniques including new irrigation and soil conservation technologies and techniques, the lack of access to financial capital and services, the lack of access to markets, the loss of vegetation, the unsustainable management of forests, the necessity for institutional and human capacity building, and the impediments to development in the global trade regime including agricultural subsidies and tariff barriers are among the challenging factors to address desertification in developing countries.

12. The Group of 77 and China is fully convinced that the full implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is the best way to address those challenges. Effective implementation of the convention necessitates the provision of adequate and predictable financial resources, the transfer of technology and know-how, and the strengthening of capacity building at all levels. In this respect, we call upon developed countries to fulfill their obligations under the convention by:

- Mobilizing substantial financial resources, including grants and concessional loans, in order to support the implementation of programmes to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought;
- Promoting the mobilization of adequate, timely and predictable financial resources, including new and additional funding from the Global Environment Facility;
- Facilitating the transfer of technology, knowledge and know-how; and
- Exploring innovative methods and incentives for mobilizing and channeling resources.

13. Further, the Group of 77 and China calls upon multilateral financial institutions to facilitate access to the funds required to effectively combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. We are of the view that the national and regional efforts to meet this global challenge

have not yet received adequate attention and support of the international community.

14. Mr. Chairman, we note with great concern that the UNCCD is the most under funded among the Rio conventions and that there is no adequate funding at the global level, including in the GEF, to implement national action plans. In fact, the allocation of 300 million US dollars in the fourth replenishment of GEF to land degradation falls short of the amount needed to combat desertification and land degradation in affected developing countries. We therefore call upon the facility to strengthen the focal area on land degradation, primarily desertification and deforestation, and reiterate our call to the donor community to scale up their allocation of financial resources to this focal area in the next replenishment cycle.

15. The Group is disappointed that the Global Mechanism (GM), which was established by a decision of COP1, was not able to deliver its full mandate which includes the mobilization and channeling of financial and technological resources from developed to developing country Parties. We consider that the Global Mechanism should be reviewed, including in its present institutional and hosting arrangement with IFAD, evaluated and reformed in a direction that allows it to play a complementary role to the GEF in providing and mobilizing resources for the elaboration and implementation of action programmes. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China looks forward to the assessment to be made by the Joint Inspection Unit and is awaiting its report to COP9.

16. Mr. Chairman, the channeling of financial resources should match with the National Action Programme Priorities, especially in light of the report of the third meeting of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which noted that the financial assistance provided by development agencies has often neglected this requirement.

17. Mr. Chairman, the transfer, acquisition, adaptation and development of environmentally sound, economically viable and socially acceptable technologies, on preferential and concessional terms, including, among others, water and soil conservation technologies, technologies to grow climate resilient, drought resistant and less water intensive crops, and technologies that improve land productivity and increase agricultural production, allows affected developing countries to better address the adverse impacts of desertification and drought. It is also equally important to transfer the capacity to use the technology in the most efficient way. It is additionally important to promote traditional and local technology, knowledge, know-how and practices and to ensure that local peoples benefit directly from any commercial use of this kind of technology.

18. The Group is of the view that strong institutional capacities are needed in order to carry out in an effective way the national action programmes. Therefore, the building and strengthening of institutions, the training of people and the development of capacities both locally and nationally reinforce the efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effect of drought. Also, the access to information and the improvement in monitoring and early warning related to desertification and drought; the promotion of public awareness programmes and people centered learning; the building of local communities capacity; the performance of land degradation assessment; the strengthening of national training, research capacities and strategic planning and management; as well as the promotion of alternative livelihoods, including training in new skills are equally important in addressing the adverse impacts of desertification and drought. Also, the identification of hot spots, including the starting points of sand storms, and establishment of early warning systems in order to warn people about the sand dune movement and dust storms remain vital in desert areas.

19. Mr. Chairman, the UNCCD's recent COP adopted a ten-year strategic plan to facilitate a systemic and worldwide response to global environmental issues affecting land and its ecosystems.

The plan highlights the importance of forging a global coalition to combat desertification, land degradation and drought in the present context of climate change. Its objectives include actions to improve both the living conditions of affected populations and the conditions of affected ecosystems, to generate global benefits through effective implementation of the Convention, and to mobilize resources to support the implementation process through building effective partnerships between national and international actors.

20. The Group believes that the implementation of the convention will need a sustained support from all stakeholders. The High Level policy dialogue on the strategy due to take place in Bonn on 27 May 2008 offers us an opportunity to renew our commitment to the effective implementation of the Convention.

21. Mr. Chairman, the integration of the National Action Programmes to combat desertification and mitigate the effect of drought in the national sustainable development strategies of affected developing countries is very important and will make the measures adopted to combat desertification at the center of the national efforts to achieve sustainable development.

22. Additionally, it is important to foster North-South, South-South as well as triangular cooperation, with the aim of enabling the developing countries to develop capacities for the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

23. In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the decision of the 62nd session of the United Nations General assembly to declare the decade 2010-2020 as the year of desertification brought new hopes and opportunities to the international community to address adequately this important global challenge in the next decade.

24. The present implementation cycle of the CSD should throw adequate light on the gaps and constraints in combating desertification and reach agreement on the policy options and practical measures to help the international community meet this challenge. It should mobilize greater investment in the fight against desertification, land degradation and drought; contribute substantively to achievement of the MDGs, in particular poverty eradication and sustainable development; and assist developing countries in adapting to the adverse impacts of climate change. The Group will contribute to laying the ground work for policy decisions to be considered next year, with a view to removing barriers impeding efforts to combat desertification and preventing the full implementation of the UNCCD.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.