



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY H.E. JOHN W. ASHE, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (New York, 5 May 2008)**

1. Mr. Chairman at the outset the Group of 77 and China congratulates you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. Under your stewardship we look forward to a fruitful review session of this most important Commission.
2. The thematic cluster of issues on the agenda of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Sessions of the Commission, namely agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa, are of paramount importance for developing countries, and I hope that the Commission seriously considers and highlights the existing implementation gaps and constraints with regards to the six themes, and in so doing from here on paves the way for removing such gaps and constraints by setting appropriate policy options and practical measures in the next year.
3. Allow me to reiterate that the discussions on thematic issues in CSD sessions should be undertaken within the context of sustainable development, emphasizing the three pillars - economic development, social development and environmental protection - which are mutually reinforcing and interrelated.
4. Mr. Chairman, the Group thanks the Secretary-General for the report on the overview of progress towards sustainable development contained in document E/CN.17/2008/2. We also thank the Secretariat for the CSD-16 Matrix, which we recognize as a useful tool to help all governments and other relevant stakeholders share information and encourage good practices. We encourage the further development of the matrix and request that care be taken to keep it relevant and useful, particularly to developing countries.
5. Turning now to substantive issues, the Group is of the view that the timing of our discussions on this thematic cluster of issues is quite opportune. Our discussions on agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa takes places when the international community is facing new challenges such as an international food crisis, a looming international financial and monetary crisis, the recent IPCC report on climate change, a stalled round of negotiations in the World Trade Organization, and declines in Official Development Assistance in 2006 and 2007. We are also at the mid-point for achieving the Millennium Development Goals with the prospect that the international community might only meet one of the internationally agreed goals. For the Group of 77 and China, this confluence of foreboding global circumstances warrants a through review and renewed and greatly strengthened and urgent efforts at enhancing the implementation of Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development.
6. Mr. Chairman, developing countries face a situation where progress on implementation is lacking at a time when the challenges to sustainable development, both old and new, are at their highest. The Group underscores the need for a renewed commitment to the Rio Principles, to encourage renewed and decisive action on addressing implementation gaps and constraints.
7. When agreeing to JPOI, governments saw opportunities and challenges, new and continuing.

The task then was to harness the opportunities for growth and development in a globally equitable and inclusive manner, while simultaneously tackling the challenges such as poverty, inequality and environmental degradation while creating an international environment and financial architecture to minimize the adverse impacts of challenges such as financial crises. Since the adoption of the JPOI, however, and despite huge efforts to create the necessary enabling domestic environment on the part of developing countries, sustainable development has been stymied by a lack of the means of implementation. This includes the failure to provide significant increases in the flow of financial resources for development called for in the Monterrey Consensus; improved trade opportunities; access to and transfer of environmentally sound technologies on a concessional and preferential basis, and capacity-building assistance to developing countries within an agreed timeframe.

8. While the Secretary-General's report on progress towards sustainable development that is before us today paints a picture of progress thus far, it is not a complete picture, as it does not present us with as thorough a review of the implementation gap in respect of Agenda 21 and JPOI as the reality would suggest. Although we recognize that the six themes for the cluster of issues are considered in separate reports, the report on the overall review of implementation does not adequately address the challenges to sustainable development posed by the continued unfair trading policies in developed countries, particularly related to the issue of agriculture subsidies. Further, it does not address the current and future impact of a global financial crises originating in developed economies and exported to the developing world, increasingly impacting hardest on rural populations, small-scale agriculture and the poor and most vulnerable developing countries, including Africa, least developed countries, land-locked developing countries and small-island developing states.

9. The Group reiterates the importance of taking further effective measures to remove obstacles to the realization of the right of peoples to self-determination, in particular peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation, which continue to adversely affect their economic and social development and are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and must be combated and eliminated.

10. Mr. Chairman, achieving the MDGs is increasingly uncertain for a good portion of the developing world, in particular in Africa. The rise in the price of food and the unfolding food crisis severely threatens to undo the progress that has been achieved in several regions, and millions of people are at risk of slipping further and further into poverty, making it more and more difficult for countries to achieve the MDGs.

11. Further, the JPOI speaks of promoting sustainable development in a globalizing world, embodying the spirit of a global partnership for development captured in MDG-8. The G77 believes that greater progress on MDG-8 is required if we are to make sufficient progress in implementing JPOI. This is an issue that has not been properly addressed by the international community when assessing implementation of the outcomes of major United Nations Summits and Conferences.

12. The Group of 77 also finds that there is a need for greater acknowledgement of the continuing efforts of developing countries to integrate sustainable development into economic policy and planning, as well as recognition of the impeding effect of external factors on such efforts. New global economic challenges such as the spreading financial crisis, global food crisis spurred by rapidly rising commodity prices, compound the challenges posed by pre-existing, long-standing impediments to sustainable development such as failure to meet the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of GNP as official development assistance to developing countries; and failure to create an equitable and inclusive international financial and trading system.

13. In conclusion, the Commission on Sustainable Development is mandated to promote further implementation of Agenda 21, and to identify constraints in implementation and make recommendations to overcome these constraints by setting policy options and practical measures. It is also mandated to review issues related to financial assistance and transfer of technology for sustainable development and capacity-building. In fulfillment of this mandate the G77 hopes that next year's policy session will address, among other things, the new and old constraints to implementation identified in this statement, with action-oriented policy recommendations to address the shortfall of financial assistance and transfer of technology, in particular environment and climate-friendly technology.

14. Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Group is encouraged by the Commission's continued engagement in a dynamic and comprehensive programme of work for CSD-16, reflecting its mandate. At the same time, we urge that for future sessions every care is taken to avoid scheduling conflicts and competing sessions. We urge the bureau and the secretariat, in planning future organizations of work, to allow for time to give due and equal consideration to mandated items, including SIDS Day, the thematic discussions and the review sessions of decisions of the Commission.

15. Mr. Chairman, the Group looks forward to the opportunity to share its views on the individual thematic issues on the agenda of CSD-16 during the thematic discussions, based on the organization of work of the Commission, and again we wish you every success in your stewardship of the Commission.

Thank you.

