



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY H.E. MR. PETER THOMSON, AMBASSADOR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FIJI TO THE UNITED NATIONS, CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77, AT THE 4TH SESSION OF THE OPEN WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (New York, 17 June 2013)

Co-Chairs,

1. I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.
2. At the outset, the Group wishes to thank you for convening this fourth session of the Open Working Group meeting on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We acknowledge your efforts in providing some guiding questions in advance and the concluding summary of the last session. We also take note of the various issue papers relating to employment and decent work for all; social protection; youth; education and culture, as well as health and population dynamics; prepared by the Technical Support Team.

Co-Chairs,

3. Our common desire for a transformative global development agenda beyond 2015 can best be achieved through collective efforts and an enhanced global partnership that places development and the wellbeing of people at its core. The post-2015 development agenda, including the SDGs, has the potential to be a turning point for achieving this aspirational transformative change if the international community and national governments seriously commit to an agenda for meaningful transformation on structural, institutional and normative levels. The subjects of discussion over the next three days are essential components of a people-centred development agenda.
4. On employment and decent work for all, the Group is of the view that employment is a leading determinant of growth and development. The employment-generating capacity of growth strategies is essential for achieving sustainable, sustained, and inclusive economic growth, which when fairly distributed, can bring millions of people out of poverty worldwide. Despite a decline in the number of the working poor, namely those employed, but living below the \$2 a day poverty line, the majority of workers in the developing world remain in informal and vulnerable jobs. This implies irregular incomes and little or no social protection for these workers. In turn, such workers are increasingly becoming more vulnerable and less resilient to cope with social, economic and environmental risks and shocks. It is imperative therefore, that developing countries, with the support of the international community and developed partners, build new and more inclusive development pathways with the aim to provide equal employment opportunities to all people in the economy, including the adoption of objective action-oriented affirmative programmes to assist the poor and the marginalised.
5. The Group is of the view that job growth requires a structural transformation of economies of developing countries, especially African economies, through industrialisation that induces value addition and economic diversification. Industrialisation is a powerful tool to generate inclusive and sustained economic growth, create productive employment and decent work and lift millions of people out of poverty. It will help developing countries, especially African countries, to address the issues of unemployment as well as employment quality, including underemployment, informality, vulnerability and working poverty.

6. Similarly, the plight of migrant workers also needs serious attention. It is important that governments make real efforts to integrate migrant workers fully into society, facilitate family reunification in accordance with the laws and specific criteria of each country and promote a harmonious, tolerant and respectful environment. The international community should give its due consideration to the linkages between migration and development in the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014, and in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda.

7. Another area of concern is the urgent need to improve market access to rural farmers to mitigate the flow of rural-urban migration. In this respect, more equitable access would imply limiting agricultural subsidies by governments in the developed countries that create an imbalanced trading system favouring developed countries. Agricultural policies need to be aligned with country priorities and global realities and take into account marginalized groups, such as smallholder farmers.

8. The Group believes that employment objectives need to become central to global actions and mechanisms. These objectives need the support of international cooperation that supports developing countries through: (1) actions at the level of international economic, financial, trade, technology and social systems, to support and enable developing countries' efforts; and (2) refrain from actions by developed countries that create barriers to developing countries' efforts and progress.

Co-Chairs,

9. On social protection, the Group is of the view that social assistance and protection policies are central to national strategies to reducing inequality while boosting productive employment. It is of grave concern that at present, four out of five people worldwide do not benefit from a level of social protection that allows them to realise their human right to social security. Ensuring a basic level of social protection and social inclusion provides a decent living for all, which is a necessity, as well as an obligation under the Human Rights instruments. Social protection systems, such as adequate health insurance, access to loans and cash benefits when needed is of vital importance. Focused attention must be given to those marginalized and vulnerable people, including women, adolescent, people with disabilities, living with HIV/AIDS, the elderly and migrants to make sure that no one gets left behind.

10. The current global consensus of austerity measures has serious implications for the ability of governments to priorities financial resources for continuing existing social protection measures or to design new ones in response to the effects of the crisis. Fiscal adjustment through public budget cuts and rationalisation of social expenditures are being carried out by governments across both developed and developing countries. These measures have been targeting social safety nets, including old-age pensions. These adjustment measures run the high risk of excluding a large segment of vulnerable households at a time when governments should be considering supporting a social protection for all, scaling up rather than scaling down social protection systems. It is imperative that governments focus on expanding social protection coverage rather than improving the targeting of existing programs.

Co-Chairs,

11. On Youth, the Group recognises Youth as an emerging group that needs special attention. For many developing countries, youth unemployment threatens the skill sets and productive capacities of entire generations. The young labour forces in society are indispensable in driving the rise of

developing countries across the production value chain. Moreover, sustained bouts of youth unemployment lead to higher rates of migration, loss of national capacities and resources, as well as leading to other social problems. Rising unemployment rates among young adults in developing countries is a severe setback to society and closely relates to national insecurity and violence.

12. Goals and targets should be geared towards providing young people with skills and vocational training to ensure they receive a chance to improve their quality of life and compete in the work market. Inadequate attention to the financial, human capital and infrastructural resource constraints needs to be resolved. A global strategy on youth and employment needs to be conceptualised within the broader objective of full employment and decent work, and should address the quality and geographic distribution of employment. The principles underpinning the post-2015 development agenda should reflect the urgency of addressing youth employment, and more broadly, the right to employment as a key social and economic right.

13. On culture, the Group recognises culture as an integral part that permeates the three dimensions of sustainable development. In a more globalising world, culture fortifies national identity, while creating and enriching a global identity and understanding of diversity that transcends borders and eliminates prejudices. Through the use of education, value systems are transmitted to create inspiring and innovative future generations that engage in dialogue and exchange of worldviews to create inclusive and resilient societies.

14. The Group views culture as both an 'enabler' and 'driver' of sustainable development. Development approaches should be adapted to local contexts and should therefore rely on the cultural resource while respecting cultural rights. Culture also drives development within a number of cultural sectors including the creative industries, cultural tourism and heritage, both tangible and intangible.

15. On education, the Group underscores the importance of a good education as the bedrock of a person's communal and personal identity. It is the tool that enables a better future, the glue that binds a collective spirit. It is also the key in shaping responsible citizenships based on principles of respect for life, human dignity and cultural diversity.

16. When developing SDGs, more attention needs to be placed on relevant and measurable learning outcomes. For example, we must ensure that not only a greater amount of children are educated, but also that the education these children receive is of high quality delivered by adequately qualified teachers - in the most rural areas as well as areas affected by conflict and disasters. Special attention must be given to traditionally vulnerable groups, who are girls, working children, rural and indigenous children, those with disabilities, children living with HIV/Aids, children in conflict, migrants, orphans and linguistic and cultural minorities. Inequalities need to be addressed through a case by case approach, rather than a one-size-fits-all target for countries.

Co-Chairs,

17. On the issue of health, the Group is of the view that health permeates all areas of sustainable development. It is closely related to the social, environmental, economic, cultural and political spheres. Changing demographics and population dynamics call for innovative, cross-cutting goals that reflect the changing health concerns facing men, women and children. Dense urban areas call for greater synergy between different sectors to address the failures of providing infrastructure and basic services to one-third of the world's urban population that live in informal settlements.

18. We express concern that non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as diabetes, heart and

respiratory diseases accounted for 34.5 million deaths in 2010 of which 80% were in low and middle income countries. This figure is expected to double within the next 20 years. This development trend is unacceptable and policies must be proactive and include access to health information and services, information on consumption and lifestyle and how to prevent health risks. Not only will this reduce health provision costs, but also contribute to economic benefits through a growing capable workforce.

19. In relation to population dynamics, the Group notes that improved family planning is an effective way to address population growth. Greater access to education for young girls in developing countries has a strong correlation with a reduction of the number of teenage and unwanted pregnancies. Increasing literacy and computing skills among women has shown to be effective in improving individual household finances, creating innovative and creative entrepreneurial activities. In the same light, attention needs to be paid to the elderly and people with disabilities. Their inclusion in society needs to be assured through the provision of social protection instruments.

20. With regard to migration and development, a paradigm shift needs to take place that recognises migration as a catalyst for economic growth as well as knowledge and skills transfer. The stigmatization of marginalized migrant groups in countries other than their own is a threat to national stability and security, and often leads to human rights violations. Ensuring better integration and the respect of human rights should become a priority in our globalizing reality.

21. Similarly, rural-urban migration is a growing concern. Focus on creating better employment and working conditions in rural areas will curb the wave of rural migrants moving to urban areas in hope of finding "better" jobs. Rural migrants easily fall trap to a mostly low-wage, perilous and irregular work cycle with little chance to climb the vocational ladder. What is more, rural work migrants typically settle in the fringes of urban areas that are prone to landslides and flashflood, with little or no access to basic services and infrastructure. Governments need to provide access to basic services, such as water, sanitation and electricity to create sustainable cities with good quality of life for all residents irrespective of their social status or income.

22. In order to respond to the call for a transformative global development agenda post-2015, the Group of 77 and China reiterates the importance for the SDG framework to address the goals on global supportive actions and objectives through an enhanced partnership for sustainable development, which should include means of implementation within each of the specific SDGs.

I thank you, Co-Chairs!