



OPENING REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR JORGE ARGENTINO, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ARGENTINA TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77, AT THE RETREAT FOR THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GROUP OF 77 ON THE UN CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20) (New York, 16 April 2011)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you all for your presence here.

And also I would like to thank Dr. Sha Zukang, Under Secretary General for Economic and Social affairs and Secretary General of the Conference and his qualified and professional team for facilitating our discussions. Let me also extend my deep appreciation to the Ambassadors of Antigua y Barbuda, Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, India, Nepal, Pakistan, South Africa and Venezuela, and Minister Mesquita Pessoa from Brazil, who have kindly accepted to co-chair the four sessions on the Objective and Themes of the Conference. I am confident that their perspective will enlighten our deliberations today.

Dear colleagues, this Retreat should aim to initiate a collective reflection at ambassadorial level on the objective and themes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to be held in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro and assist in mobilizing political support in our capitals.

As we all agree, the Group needs to build a solid common position making proposals and advancing concrete ideas to the process, showing our unity and safeguarding our interests and the principles enshrined in Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration, and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

From the beginning, the Group of 77 and China has taken the initiative to convene the Conference. We have convinced our partners on the need of holding it, we have been proactive in giving shape to the preparatory process and also in starting a negotiating modality. I would like here to refer as well to our continued call for a dynamic, effective, transparent and inclusive process and the importance we attach to addressing the three pillars of sustainable development in a coordinated, integrated and comprehensive manner. Also, The work undertaken by both our G77 Bureau Members and our experts at the level of the working group already established needs to be recognized.

The time has come to further our involvement, mobilize political support in our capitals and imagine positive and constructive responses to the challenges we face to make Rio plus 20 a new landmark in the history of sustainable development.

Dear colleagues, there are a number of initiatives at all levels where different governments and agencies are discussing the Themes of the Conference. Regrettably, they are concentrated in only one of the Themes: "a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication". In most cases, we even observe that the Theme is addressed only partially, without the proper context. The other Theme, "Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development", has received up to now less attention, whilst the Objective has been mostly ignored.

And it might be precisely in the latter, the Objective, where the Group can make a difference and send a strong political message to the Conference, and to the world.

Within the Objective, we have already stressed as a group that we find relevant to hold an in-depth discussion on progress to date and remaining gaps on implementation. We may find useful here to explore the possibility to make concrete proposals regarding funding, technology transfer and capacity building and request the Secretariat to work in a background documentation that can be easily apprehended and related to. Also, in addressing new and emerging challenges, we may need to be precise in defining which are the really new and emerging issues in the sustainable development agenda and which are the new and emerging impacts on Agenda 21 and JPOI issues due to the continuous and global multiple crises and the complex challenges posed to developing countries by the impacts of climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the increasing desertification processes, among others.

A proper perspective on the cross-cutting nature of means of implementation and its linkages to the Themes of the Conference will bring coherence and will contribute to frame discussions in our own interest.

Rio + 20 will be a crucial opportunity to assess where we stand in a context characterized by the ongoing economic and financial crisis and the unfulfilled commitments of developed countries regarding means of implementation. We therefore need to adopt a political perspective to address the particularly complex situation we are in.

It might be also essential to maintain an approach that allows to de-link different negotiating processes like climate change from the outcome of the Conference. Otherwise, we may find ourselves duplicating our efforts or even empty handed when it comes to funding and technology transfer.

As the preparatory process has shown, we clearly need to have more dialogue among ourselves and find common ground on concepts and practice. The process is for us, we envisaged it and we have to develop it in such a way that serves our common interests.

Also, one of the messages that might be worthwhile to explore is the role of the UN agencies and what we expect from them. We would like to see them working in a coordinated manner for our benefit, writing the reports and studies that we expressly require avoiding duplications of tasks, thus allocating scarce financial resources to our priorities.

The role of civil society is also central here, because we are discussing sustainable development, a concept which touches directly upon them. We may need to devise a way to have a constant interaction with major groups since they can offer perspectives that we may not be considering properly.

Dear colleagues, there are more questions than answers at this stage but I am confident that the Group will be able to generate - as always had - positive responses and proposals which are political messages and at the same time sensible, people-oriented, and bold.

My fellow Ambassadors who will be co-chairing the four sessions will certainly shed light into the process and open the way for a most interesting discussion which I look forward to listen to and participate.

I therefore invite all of you to actively engage in this dialogue in an open minded way during this Retreat. This will for sure allow us to better understand our own national positions, our red lines

and concerns and generate the necessary political awareness.

In my perception, a successful Conference in 2012 will entail setting up conditions to achieve sustainable development and eradicate poverty in our countries now. To that end, we should overcome unnecessary confrontations, build strong consensus, submit constructive proposals and show to the world our resolve to better serve our people, the real people who is behind all our endeavors.

Thank you.