



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY
COUNSELLOR FEDERICO NAVIA, DELEGATE OF THE ARGENTINE
REPUBLIC, AT THE TENTH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION
(Changwon, Republic of Korea, 10 October 2011)**

Mr President,
Mr Executive Secretary,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and great honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on the occasion of the opening session of the Tenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (UNCCD).

I would like to thank the Government of the Republic of Korea and the city of Changwon, Gyeongnam Province, for hosting this important Conference, thus showing their commitment towards the fulfillment of the objective of the Convention.

Special thanks also go to the Executive Secretary of the Convention and his staff for their efforts to further the objective of combating desertification and land degradation and for the organization and efficient running of these meetings.

Mr President,

This tenth session of the COP is the culmination of a year in which desertification has had a prominent international presence, leading to greater global awareness about the importance of developing concerted actions to address this problem in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and a higher degree of involvement of major actors, both politically and institutionally, at the highest level of the UN. We consider as a priority all efforts carried out with a view to raising awareness and promoting action to improve the protection and sustainable management of the world's drylands, home to a third of the world's population and which face serious economic and environmental threats.

We also wish to welcome the interactive dialogue that took place during the UN General Assembly high-level meeting on the theme, "Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication", on 20 September 2011, and the conclusions of the meeting of the Ministers in charge of UNCCD in those countries which have held or will hold the Presidency of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD, adopted on 3 September 2011 as the "UNCCD Geneva Call for Urgent Action on the Implementation of the Convention". We also recall the launching on August 2010 of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010-2020) which offers a unique opportunity to raise awareness on the important role sustainable land use plays for global sustainability.

Mr President,

The Group wishes to highlight the definition of strategic issues for the monitoring of the Convention

that took place under the Argentine Presidency of the Ninth Conference of the Parties (COP 9), including the recognition of the Committee to Review the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) as a permanent subsidiary body which allowed the presentation of the first reporting cycle after the approval of the Ten-Year Strategy 2008-2018.

Also noteworthy is the establishment of new methodologies since the implementation of the PRAIS system (performance review and assessment of implementation system) for collecting and analyzing data and regular and reliable information to measure and assess trends in the process of desertification at the global, national and local levels. We call on the GEF to pursue its support to the PRAIS as this constitutes a strategic investment which will benefit all our countries in the provision of accurate and reliable sustainable development data, particularly those related to environmental information.

Mr President,

Based on these important milestones in the process of our Convention, produced under the Argentine Presidency of the of COP 9 and with a view to COP 10, it is necessary that the international community and the Parties take more and better decisions to advance the fight against desertification.

To that end, we must have a framework to obtain scientific advice at the request of the Conference of the Parties, and to provide alerts about possible crisis situations. This important technical advice should nevertheless accompany and observe the political process of the Convention, ensuring that its recommendations are adopted by the Parties at the different levels of decision-making.

We stress the importance of the development and implementation of scientifically based and sound methods for monitoring and assessing the extent of desertification and land degradation and the efforts under way to promote scientific research and to strengthen the scientific base of the activities on desertification and drought under the Convention.

We need to strengthen the Convention's scientific base to contribute to a better understanding of the issues and to that effect we call for the establishment of an intergovernmental scientific panel on DLDD as a matter of equity to assess and review trends in land as well as soil degradation and restoration.

The Group also calls on the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) to ensure equitable allocation of resources to all the three Rio Conventions. We urge donors to continue the effective replenishment of the Facility to ensure that it is adequately funded in order to allow a sufficient and adequate allocation of resources to its land degradation focal area. After the recent amendment of the GEF instrument, it is clear that the GEF is officially serving as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD.

We would like to invite the GEF to properly act on issues raised by Parties during its fourth Assembly, particularly those related to ensuring national ownership, capacity-building, co-financing and the balance between GEF priorities while improving its overall effectiveness and efficiency on project cycle.

Our Convention is the appropriate international legal instrument to develop more and better tools in the fight against desertification, land degradation and drought, which must have as its main objective the improvement of quality of life of affected populations in arid, semiarid and dry subhumid areas, consistent with the objectives and principles enshrined in the Convention

This commitment is essential to the role of States as key players in supporting and facilitating efforts to combat this problem, and as guarantors of the full respect to the principle of sovereignty of States over their natural resources as enshrined in the United Nations General Assembly resolution 1803 (XVII).

Mr President,

There is also the need to enhance the implementation of the UNCCD as a global policy and monitoring framework to address issues of soil and land degradation. Let us invest in reclaiming land and carrying out sustainable land management practices. In view of the urgent need for investment in sustainable land management in arid, semi arid and dry subhumid areas, we call for the full implementation of the ten-year strategic plan and framework (2008-2018).

We firmly call on all Parties to fully support the implementation of the Convention in all its aspects, in particular by promoting the exchange of knowledge on best practices and lessons learned from global and regional cooperation in combating desertification, land degradation and drought. Emphasis should also be given to mobilization and channeling of adequate and predictable financial resources as well as facilitating its direct access, in order to help mitigate the effects of desertification, land degradation and drought and improve the livelihoods of vulnerable people affected by these most urgent matters at national, sub-regional and regional levels.

We also recognize the importance of the Regional Coordination Units as useful tools in the implementation of the Convention in the different affected regions, especially at the regional, subregional and national levels, and we invite the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism to continue their efforts to mobilize financial resources to address and improve the actions of the RCUs.

Within the framework of the Convention, the Group of 77 and China advocates the strengthening of the advisory role of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and the Committee on Science and Technology through their recommendations in order to fully implement the decisions of the Conference of the Parties, and calls for the enhancement of the technical capabilities of national coordinating bodies and National Focal Points of the Convention, through the provision of an institutional and coordinated scientific support.

The Group of 77 and China also stresses the need to cooperate and take urgent action at global and regional levels with a view to preventing and managing dust/sand storms including support by relevant international agencies for sub-regional and regional initiatives of affected countries in sharing related information and experiences, forecasting and early warning system. Combating sand and dust storms demands financial support and the transfer of technology from developed countries to developing countries.

Mr President,

The Group of 77 and China also takes note of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the assessment of the Global Mechanism of the Convention, as well as the decision of the Conference of the Parties at its ninth session requesting the Bureau of the ninth session to undertake and supervise an evaluation of existing and potential reporting, accountability and institutional arrangements for the Global Mechanism and their legal and financial implications. The Group highlights the Report prepared by the Consultants in this respect and expresses its appreciation to the COP 9 Bureau for its report to COP 10.

At this COP 10 we are prepared to make a decision that may allow us to finally overcome the enormous challenges of coordination that over many years we have had and which undermine the effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of the Convention in our affected country Parties.

The Group of 77 and China calls on all Parties to endeavor in solving the issue so that we can devote our full energy on what really matters: rescuing hundreds of millions of people suffering under the scourges of desertification, land degradation and drought. In this respect, the Group takes note of the position of the African Region adopted on the occasion of the recent meeting in Algiers aimed at solving the institutional incoherence within the UNCCD when it decided to put an end to the duplication and overlapping roles played by the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism.

Mr President,

The present situation of the drylands in developing countries is severe and its more than one billion inhabitants, who are among the poorest on the planet are constrained in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular those relating to hunger and poverty, and environmental sustainability.

Just recently, the horn of Africa region was hit by the worst drought cycle in 60 years, which had led to starvation and the loss of human lives, crops and livestock. Food prices have nearly tripled in some regions since last year, worsening the crisis. The United Nations officially declared famine in Kenya and Somalia a humanitarian crisis. If desertification continues unabated in Africa, the continent may only be able to feed 25 percent of its population by 2025, according to the United Nations University's Institute for Natural Resources in Africa report.

This reflects well the severity of the problem of drought and desertification in the developing world and in particular in Africa. DLDD corrodes the other pillars of sustainable development and is interrelated or linked to several global challenges such as food insecurity, poverty, biodiversity loss, deforestation, climate change, forced migration, water stress and the attainment of the MDGs. Addressing DLDD requires an integrated approach and enhanced cooperation and identification of synergies among the Secretariats of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity (referred to as "the Rio Conventions"), as well as the United Nations organizations and agencies, taking into account the need to respect their specific mandates.

We are convinced of the need to ensure a higher priority for desertification, land degradation and drought issues on the international agenda, in particular at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio plus 20). In this respect, the Group of 77 and China proposes that the Rio Plus 20 Conference call for the establishment of an intergovernmental scientific panel on DLDD to review trends in land as well as soil degradation and restoration.

In closing, Mr President, the G77 and China wishes to give its full support and commitment to the actions and initiatives that are carried out to combat and reverse desertification and land degradation in arid, semiarid and dry sub humid areas, and hopes that the deliberations of this session will allow us to advance in the consolidation and deepening of the activities that are being developed with a view to improving the lives of millions of people who inhabit the lands directly affected by desertification in developing countries, who are among the poorest in the planet and impeded from reaching the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those related to hunger and poverty, and to a sustainable environment.

Thank you very much, Mr President.