



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MR. ANDRÉS CORDOVA, SECOND SECRETARY OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF ECUADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS, AT THE OPENING PLENARY OF THE THIRTEENTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (Ordos, China, 6 September 2017)

Mr. President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The Group would like to congratulate you on your election as President of the 13th Session of the COP. We also extend our appreciation to the Executive Secretary, Ms. Monique Barbut, for her leadership and dedication to the cause of people suffering under the global challenges of desertification, land degradation and drought which are also linked to the global threat of climate change. We take this opportunity to thank the Government and People of the People's Republic of China for hosting this Conference, for sharing its experience in the fight against desertification, as well as for the hospitality extended to all of us since our arrival to the country.

The Group of 77 and China confers the highest importance to desertification, land degradation, drought and sand and dust storms, and recognizes the impact these challenges set, not only to human life, but for biodiversity and ecosystem services. We have come to Ordos with a proactive spirit, ready to contribute to a positive and substantive outcome of this Conference.

Mr. President,

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we stated our commitment to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions - economic, social and environmental - in a balanced and integrated manner. We stated our determination to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production patterns, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations. We also recognized that we continue to face immense challenges to achieve sustainable development. Natural resource depletion, the use of inappropriate farming practices to natural conditions and adverse impacts of environmental degradation, including desertification, drought, land degradation, freshwater scarcity and loss of biodiversity, add to and exacerbate the list of challenges which humanity and Mother Earth faces. There is an urgent need for concrete and prompt actions to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions, reduce inequalities within and among countries, and generate opportunities for sustainable development for all in harmony with nature.

We recall that in the 2030 Agenda -target 15.3- the international community committed to combating desertification, restoring degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and striving to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world by 2030.

As noted in resolution 71/229 of the United Nation's General Assembly, the achievement of the SDG's and targets, including Goal 15 and target 15.3, would serve as an accelerator to ending poverty and hunger, tackling inequality, empowering women and those in vulnerable situations, and

stimulating sustained and inclusive economic growth. Combating desertification, land degradation and drought, including through sustainable land management, can contribute to easing forced migration flows influenced by a number of factors, including economic, social, security and environmental concerns, which can, in turn, reduce current and potential fights over resources in degraded areas. Striving to achieve land degradation neutrality would significantly contribute to the three dimensions of sustainable development through the rehabilitation, restoration, conservation and sustainable management of land resources.

The review of SDG 15 at the 2018 High Level Political Forum provides a valuable opportunity for countries to showcase the progress that they are making towards achieving Land Degradation Neutrality as well as to highlight any challenges and constraints they may be facing so that these can be addressed through international collaboration of all sectors of society.

Mr. President,

We recognize the early action taken by the UNCCD Secretariat to assist countries in target setting and identification of national hot spots for rehabilitation or restoration. However, much is still needed to be done, including the need to tackle the different realities at the national and regional level to implement the decisions of the Convention. We call upon all countries to develop an integrated approach, including environmental protection, poverty alleviation and social-economic sustainable development. Today, 110 countries, most of them members of our Group, have voluntarily set national targets to advance this important move which takes the UN Convention into the realm of accountability and measurability. We look forward to discussions that explore ways and means through which the efforts that countries have undertaken to design their National Action Plans to combat desertification, land degradation and drought can help structure and advance in the operationalization of LDN targets, as well as how LDN incentives discussed and agreed at this level will aid developing countries execute and implement their National Action Plans.

The Group also recognizes the Executive Secretary's efforts to create the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund and looks forward to its entry into operational phase, as well as to having concrete discussions on the sectors, programmes and projects that this fund could consider so that these parameters can be agreed upon before funding can be provided. The Group is aware that for the new funding to make a difference, it must be combined with other financial schemes. In this respect, we call on the GEF, serving as the financial mechanism of the Convention, to allocate substantial resources to its land degradation focal area during GEF.7.

The Group notes with appreciation the report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the new strategic framework of the Convention to replace the current Ten-Year Strategy whose lifespan ends next year. We are pleased that the new strategy's time frame would coincide with that of the 2030 Agenda and we welcome the agreement obtained on having a stand alone strategic objective to deal specifically with drought. In this regard, the Group encourages all parties to work together to adopt the new strategic framework, and we look forward to strengthening linkages between the indicators used for the strategic framework of the Convention and those used in the LDN initiative.

Mr. President,

The Group is preoccupied by the severity, the scope and the frequency of droughts, sand and dust storms.

Drought bears a heavy cost on countries' economies, especially the developing countries, and entrenches poverty and hunger. So far, the approach of the international community to drought has

been largely reactive, with post-impact interventions and relief measures in the form of emergency assistance programs which so far have been limited to providing funding or other specific types of assistance such as food, livestock feed or water to those experiencing the most severe impacts. It is the hope of the Group that this COP should prioritize the urgent need to design mechanisms to increase the resilience against drought at local and international levels, and the importance of having drought policies in drought-prone regions, including through an integrated management that considers ecologic, biophysical, socioeconomic, ecosystemic and gender factors. Consequently, we need to design policy related to governance for drought risk management; monitoring and early warning systems, vulnerability and impact assessment; mitigation, preparedness, and response; as well as knowledge management and drought awareness, taking into account the different realities at the national and regional level.

The Group recognizes sand and dust storms as a serious challenge to sustainable development in the affected countries and regions, and once again calls upon the United Nations system to play its role in advancing international cooperation and support to combat sand and dust storms, and invites all other related organizations to integrate into their respective cooperation frameworks and operational programmes measures and actions aimed at combating sand and dust storms, including the following measures: enhancing capacity-building at the national level; the development and implementation of regional and subregional programmes and projects; the sharing of information, best practices and experiences and the transferring of technology; efforts to control and prevent the main factors of sand and dust storms; and the development of early warning systems as crucial tools to address this issue. In this regard, we welcome the outcome documents of the international conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms held in Tehran, 3-5 July 2017, and take note with appreciation of the ministerial declarations and technical recommendations of the conference.

Mr. President,

We firmly believe that all states and stakeholders should devote ourselves collectively to the pursuit of "win-win" cooperation for global development on the basis of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, which can bring huge gains to all countries and all parts of the world in building a community of shared future for humankind.

The Group of 77 and China restates its commitment for engaging constructively on the discussions of the COP13 agenda and to contribute to decisions that will advance the implementation of this important Convention and the achievement of SDG target 15.3. The Group supports the COP13 to have fruitful outcomes and achieve a great success. We highlight once more the importance of our actions to preserve human dignity and the need to reach the furthest behind and the most vulnerable first.

Thank you.