

STATEMENT BY MR. BAGAS HAPSORO, DELEGATE OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA TO THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AD-HOC INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP ON THE STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO FRESHWATER

New York, 23 February 1998

Mr. Co-Chairmen,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and to congratulate both of you on your elections as Co-Chairmen as well as to other members of the bureau on their respective election. The Group of 77 and China is confident that, given your collective expertise and proven ability, this meeting will be brought to a successful conclusion.

Through you, Sirs, allow me to express the Group's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his reports on the strategic approaches to freshwater management and on the activities of organizations of the UN systems in the field of freshwater resources as contained in documents E/CN.17/1998/2 and 3, respectively. We have carefully studied these reports and wish to comment on a number of issues to which our Group attach particular importance.

Mr. Co-Chairmen,

The Group of 77 and China perceives that this Working Group as well as the CSD-VI should direct itself to building upon the consensus achieved by the international community in Agenda 21 and the Programme of Further Implementation of Agenda 21. The intergovernmental discussions, negotiations and consensus in this Working Group and the CSD-VI in the area of freshwater are to be the basis of the CSD-VI recommendations. In this connection, we appreciate the efforts made by the experts group meetings, including those in Harare, Kwangju and Sao Paulo, in providing information and inputs for intergovernmental discussions.

The CSD-VI should also seek to review and take stock of any progress achieved so far in implementing existing plans of action, namely Chapter 18 of Agenda 21. In this regard, the identification of constraints, such as those of finance and technology, are necessary in order to find ways and means to overcome them, leading to the achievements of objectives already established.

Mr. Co-Chairmen,

The importance of adequate supplies and quality of freshwater for all life forms has been well established. The global problem stems largely from the finite nature of water supplies and a severe crisis that is inevitable if these resources are not sustainably managed or if new breakthroughs are not secured. Last year the United Nations General Assembly Special Session considered the urgency of planning ahead in order to forestall a future crisis in freshwater supply and ecological disaster. The call by the Special Session for a dialogue to begin at CSD-VI this coming April is therefore of paramount importance, not only for offsetting the negative effects but also for putting freshwater supplies on a sustainable footing.

The seriousness of this challenge facing the international community is reflected in the statistics on the current unsatisfactory nature of freshwater management. Two thirds of the world's population, as recorded in

the report of the Secretary-General, could experience moderate-to-high water stress by the year 2025. Since the greater majority of the world's population live in the developing countries, the trend will impact these countries most of all.

To forestall such adverse trends, the Group firmly believes that water resources development and management should be planned in an integrated manner, taking into account short- as well as long-term planning needs. They should incorporate all considerations, particularly the necessity to increase international cooperation and to renew the commitments of the international community to fulfill their agreements in Agenda 21. This would include, inter alia, the areas of financial flows, access to environmentally sound technology and capacity building that would enable national policy makers to manage the use and the supply of three important areas: drinking water and sanitation, water for agriculture and water for industry.

The Group of 77 and China noted with concern the tendency to view water mainly as an economic good. Water is a basic human need of vital importance in meeting food security needs and the alleviation of poverty as well as the protection of the environment. Thus in our view the management of freshwater should not be at the expense of its social aspects. Economic and social development as well as environmental protection should all carry equal weight in the management of freshwater.

The Group of 77 and China cannot accept the concept expressing the view that national food security has lost much of its significance in an increasingly global economy, and that water resources should not necessarily be allocated to the production of food if they can be used more profitably in other sectors of the economy to generate the necessary income to import food products.

In light of the uncertainties manifested in the so-called global economy, elevating water's economic function over its other functions, such as life-supply, food security and poverty alleviation, would be detrimental to the interest of developing countries. It is also in contravention with the World Food Summit which stresses that to implement, monitor and follow-up its Plan of Action, governments have the primary responsibility for creating an economic and political environment and assures the food security of their citizens.

Mr. Co-Chairmen,

Another area that the Group would like to reflect with concern is the idea of adopting pricing policies. The argument that the adoption of pricing policies geared toward cost recovery would enable governments to generate the necessary financial resources for capital investment and for freshwater management operation and maintenance, requires further serious studies. The Group considers that such policies may be premature at this time particularly when the stage of development of the majority of the developing countries is taken into account. In this regard, the Group would like to stress that governments should continue to play a major role in the management of freshwater in the foreseeable future.

The Group would strongly caution against turning the control of water resources over to private entities motivated solely by profit-gaining. Since extending coverage to the poor may lower profits, there is no guarantee that water systems in private hands would ensure that equity concerns are given their proper weight.

Mr. Co-Chairmen,

We have studied with great interest the activities of the organizations of the UN system in the field of water resources. These activities include data gathering/analysis and preparation of studies and reports, organization and servicing of meetings and workshops. In this regard, we would like to stress that the international community, including the relevant UN organizations and other relevant agencies, should intensify efforts in providing technical and financial cooperation to the developing countries in their endeavour to elevate both

their capacity and capability I freshwater management.

In concluding, the Group of 77 and China pledges its full cooperation to making a fair and positive contribution to the discussions during the duration of our meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Co-Chairmen.

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