

STATEMENT BY ALISON DRAYTON, GUYANA DELEGATION, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, AT THE OPEN-ENDED INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS OF THE PLEARY ON AGENDA ITEM 30: UNITED NATIONS REFORM: MEASURES AND PROPOSALS

New York, 14 April 1999

Mr. President,

The Group of 77 and China is pleased that the discussions on the Report of the Secretary-General on Environment and Human Settlements are once again underway. We support the proposal to designate Ambassador Asadi to facilitate our discussions and negotiations and we would urge an early indication of a suitable schedule of meetings which would enable a more timely and focussed consideration of this issue and allow for the full and effective participation of all delegations, especially the smaller ones.

We hope that the review of the Report and the elaboration of a resolution would not involve protracted negotiations since we are all agreed on the importance of the strengthening and revitalization of the United Nations Office in Nairobi. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China welcomes the statement of the Secretary-General of 4 May 1998, in which he indicated his decision to strengthen Nairobi and to bring it up to the level of UN Offices in Geneva and Vienna. We are all, I believe, agreed on the need to ensure the provision of stable, adequate and predictable financial support to both organizations for the fulfillment of their mandates, as contained in General Assembly resolutions 2997/XXVII and 32/162.

The Group of 77 has several concerns regarding the Secretary-General's elaboration of those tasks considered to be within the mandate of the Secretariat. It is clear that several of the proposals in this section require intergovernmental approval before they can be implemented, in indeed, before even the most preliminary action can be taken. It is deeply regrettable that the Secretary-General has chosen to adopt this approach in view of his stated concern of all organs of the United Nations playing their proper role in advancing the goals of the Organization. In this regard, it would be useful if the Secretary-General were to provide a list outlining the specific actions to be undertaken by the Secretariat which are clearly within his mandate, the manner in which they will be undertaken and an indication of exactly what these actions are expected to achieve.

Turning now to the substance of the Report on Environment and Human Settlements, the Group of 77 places considerable emphasis on the revitalization of both the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. We were therefore disappointed that the Report of the Secretary-General addressed the subject of human settlements in only the most glancing way. The comments contained in paragraphs 15-20 deal only with administrative and financial considerations; there is no detail regarding what measures should be undertaken in programmatic terms by UNCHS/Habitat. UNCHS/Habitat will also need to begin preparations to prepare for the review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in 2001. In our view, there is a need for a focussed direction from the highest level of senior management if this review is to be successful. The Group of 77 reiterates that UNEP and UNCHS/Habitat should retain their separate institutions, identity and separate Executive Directors and that all efforts should be made to ensure that they function effectively.

The Group of 77 welcomes the proposal for the establishment of an Environment Management Group for the purpose of enhancing inter-agency coordination in the field of environment and human settlements, with, of course, due regard to the need to ensure that intergovernmental level processes provide the basis for inter-agency coordination. We look forward to hearing from the Secretary-General after he has developed the terms of reference and criteria for selection of members of the EMG for the consideration and approval of Member States.

We wish to stress that the role of UNEP and UNCHS/Habitat in capacity-building and technical assistance in the field of environment and human settlements must remain important components of the work programme of both organizations. The Group of 77 considers these activities to be core elements of the activities undertaken by these organizations and we would support efforts to enhance the work and capacities of the two organizations in this area.

We suggest that the Secretary-General, drawing from the experience of other intergovernmental fora, could propose to the General Assembly modalities consistent with the rules, regulations and procedures of the United Nations, to promote the participation of civil society and major groups active in the field of environment and human settlements. I would now like to touch briefly on those proposals which give rise to particular concern.

While we support initiatives by UNEP to improve its liaison capability, we wish to point out that UNEP has no mandate to function as an "environmental guardian".

The Group of 77 and China emphasizes that UNEP cannot, and should not, become involved with conflicts of any nature, including in their identification and prevention. We are absolutely opposed to such an inappropriate normative linkage between environment and security issues, which will engage UNEP beyond its mandate and will unnecessarily politicize the discussion of environment issues.

On a related point, clarification is needed to ensure that the phrase "early warning of emergencies" is understood to refer specifically to environmental disasters. In this respect, we would encourage the Secretary-General to strengthen current information systems to increase the ability to provide early warning of natural disasters.

Mr. President,

The Group of 77 and China looks forward to working closely with Ambassador Asadi in elaborating a resolution which would provide an enabling mandate to the process of revitalizing UNEP and UNCHS/Habitat. Certainly any draft which manages to encapsulate those issues which we have highlighted in our statement would be a good basis on which to begin our work.

I thank you.