

STATEMENT BY MS. DONNETTE CRITCHLOW, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA ON AGENDA ITEM: 100(B), INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION, BEFORE THE SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York, 8 November 1999

Mr. Chairman,

It is a distinct privilege for me to address the Second Committee on Agenda Item 100(b) - International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. From the outset, Mr. Chairman, allow me to express, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his detailed and informative reports on this issue. These reports cover, not only the activities which have taken place within the United Nations system during the Decade, but also advances recommendations regarding institutional arrangements which may be put in place at the conclusion of this decade.

Mr. Chairman,

As developing countries, the Group of 77 and China attaches much importance to natural disaster reduction. We are particularly conscious of the fact that the occurrences of natural disasters can seriously undermine our efforts to achieve sustainable development. Mr. Chairman, statistics reveal that 90% of disaster victims worldwide live in developing countries. Further a single natural disaster, in the context of developing countries can eliminate years of economic growth and result in tremendous human loss and suffering.

The launching of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, provided the international community with the opportunity to consider alternative approaches to dealing with natural disasters. For far too long the approach had been ad hoc and reactive rather than proactive and preventive. Since the beginning of the Decade one observes that from Antigua and Barbuda to Turkey, natural disasters have struck with increasing frequency and severity. At the same time the contribution of the international community to emergency relief have decreased significantly in comparison to previous decades.

Mr. Chairman,

The current Decade has taught us some very valuable lessons. Firstly, it has been made clear that the effect of natural disasters can be mitigated through a proactive and concerted approach with the involvement of all sectors in planning, preparedness, prevention, relief and rehabilitation. More importantly, given the regularity and the profound impact of natural disasters on the economic and social development in developing countries, it is now evident that this issue must be treated by the international community in the context of sustainable development rather than as a purely humanitarian concern. The Group, also, fully supports the view of the Secretary-General, as posited in document A/54/136, that insufficient investment in disaster reduction leads to eventually much higher costs for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction.

Mr. Chairman,

The efforts of the United Nations and the relevant bodies, inside and outside of this system, in the promotion of natural disaster reduction have contributed to the progress made thus far and are to be commended. It is significant to note that as a result of these efforts developing countries now have increased access to early warning systems which have facilitated preparedness and ultimately led to the mitigation of much more serious losses and damage.

Governments of developing countries have also been making their contribution to disaster reduction efforts. At the national level, the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action is being implemented and some Member States have established International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction committees or focal points to manage the implementation of disaster reduction programmes. However, these programmes are being implemented with very limited financial resources, a factor that seriously hampers their application and effectiveness. We therefore urge the international community to enhance their support in both financial and technical terms.

Mr. Chairman,

As the decade draws swiftly to a close, it is the firm belief of the Group of 77 and China that the lessons learnt and the progress made should inform continued and intensified action on this issue in the future. We hold the view that the United Nations should continue to serve as the main platform for action in this area. We therefore endorse the recommendation of the Secretary-General for the formation of an inter agency Secretariat on natural disaster reduction beginning January 1, 2000. We request that this inter agency Secretariat undertake a review of these temporary arrangements after the first year of operations and to submit proposals on the adjustments necessary for its effective implementation of its mandate. The Group also urges the international community to increase their financial contributions to the Natural Disaster Reduction Trust Fund and for the further development of and the transfer of technology to developing countries with respect to disaster reduction.

Mr. Chairman,

Indications are that in the next 5 years, the El Nino phenomenon will strike us yet again. In order to adequately prepare for this eventuality, the Group of 77 and China requests that the Secretary General take all necessary action for the establishment of the International Research Center on El Nino phenomenon in Ecuador. Further, the Group notes with satisfaction the efforts of the Government of Ecuador in this regard and particularly their hosting of a meeting last year November on this issue. We also urge the international community to provide financial, technical and scientific assistance, with a view to minimising the effects of this phenomenon.

In conclusion, the Group of 77 and China re-emphasizes the importance we attach to natural disaster reduction. We believe that the Decade was useful particularly since it highlighted that preventive action can reduce devastation as a result of natural disaster. The challenge before the international community is now to intensify action towards reducing the effects of natural disasters and thereby support already vulnerable developing economies in their efforts to achieve sustainable development.

I thank you.