

STATEMENT BY MR. OSITADINMA ANAEDU OF NIGERIA, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTERSESSIONAL AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

New York, 29 February 2000

Mr. Co-Chairmen,

The Group of 77 and China wants to thank the Secretariat for preparing detailed report and background documents on sustainable agriculture and rural development and considers the documents as valuable basis for discussions.

Mr. Co-Chairmen,

The Group of 77 and China recognizes that the principles established in Rio Conference provided the basis for sustainable agricultural and rural development as indicated in Chapter 14 of Agenda 21, with integrated linkages to economic, social and environmental objectives. The Group notes that most of the same objectives were set by the World Food Summit Plan of Action and in final agreements of other recent conferences in economic, social and environmental areas. The basis for sustainable agricultural development is already there, but only implementation has been lacking.

The Group appreciates the highly technical and detailed analysis of the problems of the sustainable agriculture and rural development as well as the accurate statistical data in the report on the devastating consequences of slow progress in that area, though we regret the absence of providing concrete proposals on what should be done outside domestic national agenda to redress the situation. It is obvious that the burden of implementing sustainable agriculture is placed squarely on developing countries. In other words, all recent agricultural sector policy reforms meant to provide a stable legislative framework and to guarantee ownership and access to productive resources, especially on land; improving the functioning of markets, including for labour and credit; sanctioning of property rights; and creation of risk-reduction, indicated in paragraph 16 of the report are to be executed by the domestic resources.

The Group observes that the problem confronting sustainable agriculture and rural development is not in lack of new ideas or concepts but in the inability of the international community to implement already existing proposals, in respect of the provision of adequate flow of financial resources, technology transfer and technical assistance as well as capacity building in areas of training and awareness as clearly stated in agenda 21. The main source of external funding as provided in paragraph 76 of programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21 in form of official development assistance (ODA) has been declining consistently over the years. While foreign direct investment (FDI) has increased significantly to developing countries during the same period, it has been highly uneven and directed mainly outside agricultural sector. The overall result has been the reduction of the total value of resource flow into the agricultural development and rural development in general and to the achievements of the sustainable agricultural and rural development objective in particular. There is dire need to reform international financial architecture to provide adequate resource flow to wider areas of the world, especially to developing countries.

The Group insists that this forum should avoid introduction of new concepts, which do not have broad consensus, to be discussed here. It could only create more difficulties for the process in CSD-8. The Group is of the view that the introduction of multifunctional character of agriculture and land may create trade distortions and unjustifiable trade barriers and unjustifiable subsidies in general. Efforts by the international community should be geared towards the total elimination of export subsidies and not its reduction, as well as trade distorting policies that together constitute very formidable obstacles in providing market access for goods from developing countries to developed countries.

The direct consequence of slow progress in sustainable agricultural and rural development is the persistent increase in level of abject poverty in developing countries. It has further widened the gap between rich and poor countries and within countries, and as a result led to the marginalization of the poor in general and women in particular. In such a situation, most developing countries were hard pressed to introduce different measures proposed by international financial institutions and policies valid for developed countries to reverse the trend. Many developing countries have undergone various forms of structural adjustment and macro-economic stabilization measures with little or no progress due to lack of the basic ingredient – financial resources, needed to implement domestic policies that could sustain development in agriculture and rural development, especially in the context of deepening and irreversible trend of a globalizing world economy.

The Group notes that paragraph 15 of the report painted a rosy picture of reforms of agro-environmental policy in Europe, Canada and indeed Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries as a whole. It presented a world of good practices for sustainable development without indicating proposals within those reforms that could be harmful to apply in the developing countries. The Group rejects the attempt to validate these proposals as a panacea to solve all problems of sustainable agricultural development. It is obvious that despite progress in reducing trade distortion policies, support and protection of agriculture is still very high in many developed countries and adversely affect agriculture in developing countries by depressing the present commodity prices. This has undermined investment as well as public support for domestic agriculture arising further from importation of cheaper food from developed countries as a result of export subsidies. The central issue is not just about free trade but fair trade.

While the Group is open to further study and research on the issue of plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture as reported in paragraphs 48 – 51 of the report, it has to be stated clearly that the outcome of such research in these areas must be subjected to proven tests that will establish the environmental impact of the product, before its introduction into the international market, especially in developing countries where the system of control is still inadequate. As well, the Group is cautious on the issue of organic agriculture as reflected in paragraphs 52-54. It is obvious that there will be tremendous limitations and risks in the production of this type of food in developing countries. It is not the solution to developing countries needs. Organic agriculture could later become the basis for developed countries to set standards and labeling process that could lead to trade barriers against developing countries. It is an immediate contradiction to cite the effect of agro-chemical and other technology on agriculture in paragraph 34 and at the same time calls for support for organic food production as recommended in paragraph 38. There is urgent need to control the level water pollution from the use of such chemicals. It is highly impossible to resolve issues of agriculture and rural development without dealing in a substantial way with the issue of availability of water resources.

The Group notes some good proposals in the report on control of pests and diseases, integrated plant and forest management, issues of training but insists that what is lacking is essentially the means to implement those proposals. The Group underlines the need for action to be taken on transfer of technology, capacity building and the implementation of the commitments of Agenda 21 and relevant other agreements on agriculture and rural development.

I thank you.