

# Statement by Ambassador Bagher Asadi, Chairman of the Group of 77 (2001), at the Brainstorming Meeting on World Summit on Sustainable Development

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Dear Colleagues,

It is, as always, a great pleasure to be with G-77 colleagues, in formal meetings in mid-Manhattan, or in this informal gathering in such a beautiful surrounding where one does not feel claustrophobic at all. Thanks to Ambassador Widodo and Ambassador Kumalo and the Permanent Missions of Indonesia and South Africa for organizing this timely initiative for this important process.

To be very frank with you, fact of the matter is that my feelings today should be quite different with the feelings I had up to 11 O'clock yesterday morning – to be precise, up to 11:15 – when my Foreign Minister handed over the gavel to President Chavez of Venezuela. Up to that very moment I had the Group's Chairmanship hat on my head. But not since that moment. But, I find myself here, today, and making a statement on WSSD, which I suppose is more in a personal capacity than anything else. And today happens to be January 12. The same day one year ago we assumed the chairmanship. And I see Chief Mbanefo right across me in this room; he handed over the chairmanship to me. As for the current Chairman, Ambassador Milos Alcalay, I think he is still busy seeing off his President. He should join us later today or perhaps tomorrow morning.

Apart from feelings, I should be very frank - as always - that after one whole year of intensive work, for myself and all my colleagues in the Chair's team, practically I feel numb. Aside from vacation, I should have taken a long, long sleep, just to be away from all serious work. Perhaps in the days ahead I should get that with the help of sedatives. At least the idea did not prove practicable for the first day after turning the hat in. Practicable, and in other words, do-able, do mean a lot to the process we are dealing with; in fact, they mean a lot to the work of the Group of 77.

As I am sure you remember, yesterday Minister Kharrazi emphasized, in his farewell speech to the Group, the importance of this concept along with a number of other concepts. He underlined practicability and do-ability as well as realism, objectivity, future-looking determination and boldness in our approach to the work of the Group of 77. And I think this should be the right approach for us today in addressing the WSSD process. When I was jotting down notes in Farsi for this meeting – as is usually the case for me when I am not reading from a prepared text – I said to myself let's start with this point. And I consider it a good window into our enterprise today.

The preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) has reached a critical stage. The outcome, the input, of all the regional and sub-regional meetings is with us now. The Secretary-General's report is issued. To be fair, I think it is a good report, particularly as far as the assessment of developments in the field of sustainable development since Rio are concerned. Again, in all fairness, it appears that the report is not as rich and forthcoming in its recommendations for future policies and measures. My impression is that this is rather deliberate, in the sense that the Secretariat has deliberately chosen to take this approach. Well, had they approached it differently they might have ended up reflecting more of either the concerns of the developing world or alternatively, those of the developed world, which would have been rendered contentious and not credible to either side. So, they have opted for this approach, leaving the intergovernmental body, all of us, developed and developing, to figure out, to negotiate the future – which I think could be considered reasonable.

Now, all of us - the Group of 77 as well as all our negotiating partners – are in a position to have a critical assessment of the preparatory process, particularly that the next PrepCom is coming up in two weeks time. I am very happy that the Group of 77 has held a number of meetings at the expert level – thanks to the perseverance of my Dear colleagues, Mr. Hossein Moeini, himself an old hand in the field of environment and sustainable development – and has come up with a good paper. The final outcome of these valuable consultations within the Group is now before us : “Preliminary position of G-77 and China on WSSD”. As I am informed, this Position Paper has been structured on the basis of the provisions of the CSD-9 decision.

The Position Paper is rather detailed and long – 13 pages – which I am sure, and as all of us happen to know, will grow much longer as we approach the Johannesburg Summit. By way of brief introduction of the Paper, let me say that it has a number of introductory paragraphs, where some of the major and fundamental concepts close to our heart in the area of sustainable development are captured. The Paper also contains the following sections:

I – Assessment of the implementation of the Agenda 21, major accomplishments and lessons learned;

II- Constraints and obstacles hindering the implementation of Agenda 21;

III- Sectoral and cross-sectoral issues;

IV- Themes for WSSD;

V – New opportunities and challenges;

VI- Concrete measures with specific timetables to be proposed for removing the obstacles, with necessary financial and institutional requirements at national, regional and international levels;

- at international level;
- at regional level;
- at national level;

VII – WSSD outcomes

Since most of the colleagues present here are the same G-77 experts who have worked to prepare the Position Paper, I do not see any need to delve into the detailed presentation of the concepts, ideas and provisions. Instead, I merely suffice to share with you some of my perceptions. When you look at Section VI on Concrete Measures, as is expected from our traditional G-77 outlook, you find a rather detailed, articulate section on international level, covering a wide area and a whole lot of issues and of course, expectations. Simultaneously, the sections on regional and national action are quite brief and lack details and articulation. If we had access to the position paper of the developed partners, I suppose their emphasis would instead be on the national and regional level, with lip service to the international level.

This is the dichotomy that exists between our outlook and theirs. And as we all know, the bulk of negotiations – in this process as in all other multilateral processes – is generally speaking taken up by the polemics and haggling over this dichotomy. We may not be terribly happy about it either, but, fact it is. All those who have worked with me, over the past few years and not just during the past year when I had the Chair’s hat, know that I have always believed in the necessity of balance between action at both national and international levels. And that is how I look at this aspect; the balance is inevitable and we have no other alternative but to reach that balance, difficult and illusive as it is.

Since this text was finalized last week, that is, while I was still at the helm, by necessity, I support it and defend it. I consider the Position Paper a valuable piece of work that should be able to help the two-day

meeting here to prepare the Group substantively for real, serious participation in the next PrepCom meeting. I am sure that the exchanges here, particularly with the personal participation of a number of active G-77 ambassadors in the field of sustainable development, would further refine and enrich the Group's position and the Paper before us.

On the few overriding issues I wanted to touch briefly, let me say, even to the detriment of sounding rather repetitious and mundane, that we understand the concept of sustainable development – a valuable heritage from Rio – as it was originally coined in UNCED and with its three pillars; economic development, social development and environmental protection, and needless to underline, with the balance among them, and that they are mutually supportive and reinforcing. I doubt I need to refer to the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” or the question of sovereignty of states and the imperative of respect for it. You can find all these fundamental concepts in the first paragraph of the Position Paper and also in the other paragraphs in the introductory section.

After a decade since Rio, what is more important from a practical, policy point of view is the question of International Sustainable Development Governance. With Adnan Amin, as the representative of UNEP and Dr. Klaus Topfer, here with us, let me very frank about it. I do not say this in a polemical sense at all. I really mean it. International Sustainable Development Governance (ISDG) is not raised and talked about just because UNEP and others talk about International Environmental Governance (IEG). All of us have been hearing about IEG since the Malmo Meeting and the Malmo Declaration and more so, since the 21st Session of the UNEP Governing Council back in February 2001. All of you know fully well that the Group of 77 in New York has been directly and actively involved in the IEG process all the way from Nairobi till now and we have contributed to the process substantively. We will continue to do so until the process is completed and its final outcome is brought to the table within the overall framework of the preparatory process for WSSD. But, let me just underline, after a decade of policy development and policy implementation, we have come to the rather sober conclusion that the question of international governance for sustainable development needs to be addressed, and seriously at that. That is why I said that I do not talk about it in a polemical sense.

As the last overriding concern I turn to the question of international cooperation and partnership. Yesterday, my Minister emphasized, as he had back in mid-November at the Annual Ministerial Meeting of the Group of 77, that international cooperation should take place across the board and not just in the area of peace and security. As we all have come to observe since 11 September and those tragic, inhuman terroristic acts here in the States and what has followed as a consequence, there has been a perceptible shift towards a higher profile for international cooperation for peace and security. I have to add, though, that Minister Kharrazi was addressing the Financing for Development (FfD) process when he made that point. But, here, we are dealing with WSSD, as the other important on-going multilateral process in which we are involved. Here as in the case of FfD, the success of the whole process depends, in the final analysis, on genuine international cooperation for development.

On this point I close my remarks and thank you all for the opportunity that was afforded me to play Chair after having relinquishing the post.