

Presentation by Ambassador Milos Alcalay, Permanent Representative of Venezuela to the United Nations, Chairman of the Group of 77, at the Brainstorming Session Preparatory to the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD)

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Mr. Co-Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Group of 77, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Permanent Missions of Indonesia and South Africa for co-organizing this important retreat. It is an excellent opportunity for the developing countries to clearly define the objectives that they would like to pursue at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Considering the current international political climate, this Summit provides us with a historic opportunity to advance the development agenda.

The Group of 77 has maintained since Rio that the three pillars of sustainable development, namely, economic growth, social development and environmental protection have to be simultaneously pursued. One cannot and should not be achieved at the expense of the other.

Another important pillar of the Group's position is the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries should bear the responsibility for the damage that is caused to the environment by their unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.

To share this responsibility, the developed countries had agreed at Rio that developing countries would be provided with the means of implementation. Agenda 21 had concrete commitments on new and additional resources as well as on transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

The whole edifice of Rio was built around these agreements. Unfortunately, the last decade has seen little progress in the implementation of Agenda 21. In some cases, the situation has worsened. Inequality and poverty are on the rise. Environmental degradation continues unabated. Overall, the situation of developing countries has not improved, as it was hoped at the time of Rio.

Moreover, new challenges like globalization has led to the marginalization of a significant number of developing countries. The growing threat of HIV/AIDS is also a major obstacle to sustainable development, particularly for African countries.

Mr. Co-Chairman,

Agenda 21, which was designed for the 21st century, provides a globally agreed framework not only for the pursuit of sustainable development but also to address new challenges. There is no doubt in our mind that WSSD, instead of coming up with new ideas, should focus on the implementation of Agenda 21, particularly on the means of implementation.

For this reason, I propose that we make sure that the preparatory process for the WSSD does not spend too much effort or time on assessing the past performance. We can simply list the constraints and then move forward towards action. The Group of 77 has to jointly make an endeavour to ensure that we are not dragged into futile negotiations or end up reproducing already agreed text. We do not want reiteration or reaffirmation.

We want implementation through concrete and tangible initiatives.

I would like to borrow from the report of the Secretary General to further elaborate on this point. The Summit should focus on practical steps. Partnerships could become a vehicle for undertaking those steps. The other important task for the Summit is to reinvigorate political will that should lead to a renewed commitment to global cooperation and solidarity.

While the report of the Secretary General provides a broad framework for strengthening the implementation of Agenda 21, it falls short of providing specific time-bound measures to overcome the constraints that have hampered the implementation so far.

It is our belief that the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) must adopt clear action plan to deal with the challenges of globalization.

In the areas of finance, investment, trade and technology transfer, the Group of 77 should present time-bound targets. We believe that the Millennium Declaration targets on poverty eradication, access to freshwater should be supported by targets on the means of implementation. G-77 should seriously consider putting a deadline for achieving the ODA target of 0.7%. We may suggest that the developed countries should meet this target as soon as possible but no later than 2012, which is ten years after the Johannesburg Summit.

Trade is recognized as an engine of economic growth. Developing countries are at a disadvantage when it comes to market access in the areas of their interest, namely, agriculture and textiles. Although Doha meeting of WTO has initiated a process for discussion on these issues, WSSD may consider suggesting a timeframe for the total elimination of trade distorting subsidies in developed countries.

Foreign Direct investment, which remains largely concentrated in a few developing countries, has emerged as a major source of financing development. We need an international initiative to provide incentives to attract investment for those countries, which are otherwise unable to receive FDI.

Similarly, in the area of transfer of technology we have to suggest time-bound measures that ensure that developing countries are given access to environmentally sound technologies on preferential and concessional terms, particularly to the publicly owned technologies.

Capacity building should emerge as the foundation stone of the outcome of WSSD. Developing countries need extensive resources and technical assistance for human, institutional and infrastructure development. G-77 needs to present time-bound targets in these areas as well.

I would now like to turn to some specific issues like poverty eradication, unsustainable consumption and production patterns, health, energy, water and sanitation etc.

On poverty eradication, we have an agreed target from the Millennium Declaration. WSSD needs to focus on how to achieve this target and how it relates to other pillars of sustainable development. For instance, poverty eradication in Africa cannot be pursued without simultaneous action on desertification, access to water, health and education. WSSD has to promote integration of the various dimensions of sustainable development.

In the area of consumption and production patterns, G-77 should propose a specific time for improving resource efficiency by factor 4 in developed countries. A decade could be a reasonable timeframe.

Mr. Co-Chairman,

The Secretary-General has proposed launching of a global alliance on renewable energy that will focus on providing access to clean, affordable energy to one billion people in developing countries, who do not have

access to commercial energy. He has also proposed similar initiatives on health, water and sanitation. The Group needs to make sure that these initiatives come to fruition at the Summit and do not simply remain expressions of good intentions.

Mr. Co-Chairman, now I would like to address the critical issue of follow-up, monitoring and international institutional arrangements for sustainable development governance. Discussions on the issue of environmental governance are already underway. Final results of that process will become available in February this year. Governance in the areas of finance and trade is going to be addressed at the International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Mexico in March. The Group has to remain actively engaged in these processes.

At the same time, we need to initiate some discussions on this issue so that we are well prepared for the Third Session of the preparatory committee where all these outcomes will serve as inputs. G-77 may start deliberating on the future role of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The role should be determined by the functions that this body has to perform. It should be a forum for normative discussions but with an operational arm for implementation and coordination in the UN system.

While defining new role for the Commission, we have to keep in mind the increasing importance of Major Groups, particularly the private sector in the implementation process. Without having any impact on the intergovernmental nature of the UN, we may devise creative ways of engaging the private sector and other Major Groups.

This is our initial thinking on the preparations for WSSD. Of course, a lot of work has to be done before the second session of the Preparatory Committee starts. Venezuela, as the new Chairman of the Group, is ready for this task. But we rely heavily on the guidance and cooperation from members of the Group.

We have to work together to ensure that the Johannesburg Summit becomes a new beginning for international development cooperation. G-77 should get ready to play its due role in shaping the outcomes of the Summit. The Group does not want general commitments and noble expressions of well wishes. We want concrete, tangible, measurable initiatives within a specified period of time. We can no longer hold on to the promise for a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Thank you.