



STATEMENT BY MR SIVUYILE MAQUNGO, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON BEHALF OF THE G-77 AND CHINA, AT THE INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS OF THE PLENARY ON ENVIRONMENT (New York, 19 April 2006)

Mr. President,

The Group of 77 and China is pleased to contribute to this informal consultation as part of the discussion on United Nations reforms. The Group recognizes the need for and stands ready to contribute to the search for measures to strengthen environmental management through, inter alia, enhanced coordination, improved policy advice and guidance, scientific knowledge, technology support and capacity-building.

The Group would like to declare its willingness to explore the possibility of coordinating environmental activities in a manner that would in the final analysis contribute to a better world for all, and that would not promote overlap and duplication, given all the parallel processes that are presently under way in the United Nations.

It is neither news nor secret that divergent views still persist on some aspects of environmental governance, particularly with regard to its institutional framework and processes. Therefore, the Group of 77 and China would like to reaffirm its commitment to the International Environmental Governance process agreed to in Cartagena in 2002 and is contributing to this discussion on the firm understanding that no time limits would be set or pressure brought, to reach consensus on those issues that have remained unresolved, including on the agenda of inter-governmental bodies outside the General Assembly.

Nowhere are the challenges of coordination and coherence within the United Nations system more evident than in the field of the environment, where there are multiple actors performing multiple tasks with serious consequences for all, particularly in developing countries. Our best efforts as developing countries, combined with our demonstrable political will, have proven insufficient to overcome the environmental challenges we face. These challenges transcend the issues of commitment and will, but relate more closely to our lack of capacity, inadequate resources including financial, human and technical, unfair agricultural, trade and other economic policies, which impede our development efforts. Thus, the Group of 77 and China cannot over-emphasize the need for a comprehensive and robust international development agenda that promotes the achievement of national development strategies.

In this regard, United Nations environmental activities must not only be supportive of the objectives of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields, but also more importantly, preserve the integrity of the three pillars of sustainable development agreed to in Agenda 21, the Millennium Summit, the World Summit on Sustainable Development and more recently, the 2005 World Summit.

The Group of 77 and China recognizes that achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs is not a matter of choice for developing countries, but a necessity to provide better standards of living, restore human dignity, and free our people from the scourge of want and fear. However, it is not entirely within the capacity of developing countries to bring this to pass without a friendly international environment and enabling policies and practices.

In addressing the issues emanating from paragraph 169 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome and with specific reference to environmental activities, G77 and China believes strongly that those activities must be supportive of and respect the three pillars of sustainable development and seeks assurance that this is the objective.

On the questions of enhanced coordination, improved policy advice and guidance, and strengthened scientific knowledge and assessment and cooperation, these are niche areas where the United Nations Environment Programme has gained considerable experience and expertise. Our Group is of the view that the exploration of the possibility of a more coherent institutional framework to foster more efficient environmental activities in the United Nations system, with enhanced coordination, improved policy advice and guidance must aim to add value over and above results that have been achieved through existing institutions and structures, reduce costs to developing countries, build capacities and foster the transfer of knowledge and technology to developing countries. This could be achieved through the full and urgent implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building.

Specifically, we should assess the effectiveness of existing institutions and mechanisms such as UNEP and the

Environment Management Group, identify their strengths and weaknesses and factors that impinge on their performance before we decide on the best course of action. A case in point is the issue of fragmentation, which manifests itself both on the normative and operational side. We believe that strengthening UNEP and other coordinating mechanisms in the immediate and short-term, would place them on a strong footing to fulfill the mandate of global advocacy and coordination on environmental governance. To this end and consistent with resolution 53/242 conscious efforts should be made by United Nations agencies including its specialized bodies, to better utilize the facilities of the United Nations Office in Nairobi as the only United Nations body with its headquarters in a developing country for the environment-related activities. Development partners should also endeavour to provide stable, predictable and adequate financial resources for UNEP, including its share of the UN regular budget beyond the paltry 4 percent it currently draws from the regular budget.

Towards a meaningful participation, the Group would like to seek clarification on the process and its interface with the system-wide coherence process. Specifically, the Group is interested to understand how the process of environmental coordination will be managed, notably in terms of the methodology to be used, the terms and references informing this process, as well as its expected or anticipated synchronization with the broader debate of the United Nations reform. More succinctly, the Group is interested in the relationship between the intergovernmental process and the Secretary-General's High-level Panel. Clarification is also sought on the Co-Chairs' understanding of "tightly-managed entities". The Group has expressed concern that the concept of "tightly" is being interpreted by some predominantly in terms of finances. We are hoping that gains made in past debates on a better world for all are not going to be reduced to a cost-cutting exercise.

The Group would like to remind this meeting that "from our origins to the future... from Stockholm to Rio de Janeiro to Johannesburg" and in the World Summit Outcome, Member States reaffirmed that "development is a central goal by itself and that sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental aspects constitutes a key element of the overarching framework of the United Nations' activities". We further reaffirmed our "commitment to achieving the goal of sustainable development including through the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation". The quintessence of our commitment is "to eradicate poverty and to promote sustained economic growth, sustainable development and global prosperity for all".

It is our concern that should the issue of environment be dealt with in isolation of the other two pillars of sustainable development, the gains and possible hopes for the future of the world's poor hang in the balance.

On this basis, let me reiterate the G77 and China's willingness to explore the possibility of finding a more efficient and effective framework to deal with the issue of environmental activities within the context of sustainable development.

I thank you.