



Statement by H.E. Mr. Mohamed Bennouna, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations, Chairman of the Group 77, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, at the High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council (Geneva, 30 June 2003)

Mr. President,
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me and privilege to address, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China the ECOSOC and to take part in the work of its High level Segment.

I would like at the outset to cordially thank Mr. Kofi ANNAN, Secretary General of our Organization for the report submitted to this Session which will help us define the outlines of a crucial issue for developing countries.

I take also this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr. Gert ROSENTHAL, President of the Council for the able manner in which he leads the works of this important body which strives for a better coordination of the efforts undertaken by the United Nations system for development.

Mr. President,

The choice of the theme for our debate this year is very appropriate. In fact, the rural areas in the majority of developing countries continues to be home of to the three quarters of the world's poor, and the agricultural sector remains the main pillar of economy and the pivotal factor on which depend all the other economic activities.

Given that the bulk of the agricultural activity takes place in the countryside, the rural areas have, therefore, a considerable impact on the national economic choices and strategies for social and economic development.

In this respect, rural development, which ultimately aims at poverty eradication and the achievement of favorable conditions for a sustainable and harmonious development, requires the adoption by the governments of developing countries of an integrated approach, which involves the contribution of all the relevant stockholders, including local authorities, private sector, civil society, developed partners and relevant international organisms.

In fact, it is a matter of adopting policies which can deal with the rural development issue in a global and integrated manner through the launching of projects and initiatives in favor of the rural world in all sectors, particularly, infrastructures, social services, human and natural resources, financial services and environment protection.

Furthermore, if it is commonly agreed that the task of development is, first of all, the responsibility of Governments, development partners and international organisms should, also complement the efforts undertaken at the national level within well defined strategies.

Such strategies involve, first, the establishment of an appropriate administrative reform which focuses, particularly, on the decentralization of governmental prerogatives that are directly linked to the resources management and the reinforcement of local capacities.

They, also, involve the adoption of innovative agricultural and food policies capable of mobilizing all the resources, particularly, private investments with a view to increasing agricultural productivity, diversifying production and improving the means of subsistence of rural populations.

In the context of rural development and poverty eradication, I would like to underline that the recognition and reinforcement of the role and status of women in the rural world remain a challenge which should be taken up as a priority because it constitutes the key of success of any strategy of sustainable rural development.

Mr. President,

The development of rural areas, because of its scale and the multiple related factors, requires at the same time the adoption of appropriate and integrated national strategies as well as a clear determination for support from the entire international community.

In fact, in many developing countries, poverty affects the big majority of the populations living in the rural zones. Combined with the serious lack of infrastructures and the difficulties to access productive assets as well as social services and basic health care, poverty eradication requires an effective and sustained mobilization of local, national and international energies within a common and concrete policy aiming at preparing the favorable conditions for the success of the process of sustainable development. Health care is crucial for rural development.

In several developing countries, the rural poor are suffering from diseases that harm seriously production and food security, especially in Africa. The entire international community has to mobilize resources and technology and intensify the fight against HIV/AIDS given the immense and dangerous impact of this epidemic on food production and food security, particularly in Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

Facing the current irreversible process of globalization and looking forward to reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the development of rural areas, where poverty continues to heavily harm the big part of rural people, is becoming more urgent than ever before.

It is a matter of urgency to work towards creating an international macro-economic environment conducive to rural development and poverty eradication. This goal requires the setting-up of mechanisms which can allow market access for products originating from developing countries and the financing of rural development.

As for trade in products of export interest to developing countries, it is imperative that the Doha negotiations process should result in substantial reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers which constitute, for developing countries, serious obstacles to products of developing countries and to which their foreign trade depends heavily.

High tariffs, tariff peaks and tariff escalation imposed to developing country processed products, particularly in the agro-industry sector, continue not only to weaken market access of these products, but also to reduce drastically the possibilities of diversification of commodities of export interest to developing countries

In the same vein, it is also necessary that developed countries reduce the subsidies granted to their agricultural sector and participate in the establishment of appropriate mechanisms in order to mitigate the negative impact of the decline and fluctuations of commodities prices on the income of

developing countries, particularly, on the agricultural sector in the rural world.

In fact, the world commodity markets affect seriously agriculture, mining, forestry and fishery. The declining of the terms of trade for commodities, the instability and current low level of commodity prices are among the main obstacles to rural development and the achievement of the MDG to halve poverty by the year 2015.

Market access difficulties as well as supply side constraints, such as the problems of diversification, inability to meet technical, sanitary and phytosanitary requirements, in addition to trade distorting subsidies in the developed world, are also among the very serious obstacles to agriculture and rural development in developing countries.

Mr. President,

It is also essential, if we have to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, to devote the part it deserves of financing for development to rural areas and agriculture. This supposes direct and increased implication of the international organizations, bilateral donors, international financial institutions and the regional banks for development with a view to improving their role in the mobilization of the necessary financial resources for a real economic take-off of the rural zones in developing countries

It is urgent to reverse the decline of Official Development Assistance to reach the common agreed targets in this respect and increase the part of ODA to agriculture and rural development.

In this regard, we take note with satisfaction of the initiative undertaken by the G8 members, in the framework of the Plan against Famine especially in Africa, adopted in Evian on 3 June 2003, as far as food security and rural development are concerned. In this initiative, the G8 members undertake, among other things, to work towards reversing the decline of Official Development Assistance to agriculture and increasing trade opportunities for developing countries.

Mr. President,

All developing countries undertakings are without a considerable impact if debt problems are to stay without drastic solutions. Debt problems are imposing a big burden to developing countries and turn many of them into net capital export countries. It is therefore crucial for rural development in developing countries to address these very serious problems with political will and determination.

Rural development requires also coherence of the policies among the international economic cooperation actors at both governmental and institutions levels, as well as the creation of a favorable environment to the encouragement of direct foreign investment in the rural areas and the agricultural sector.

South-South cooperation could play a considerable role in rural development and poverty eradication. A more dynamic and pragmatic cooperation among developing countries, if supported by the international community, will contribute concretely to capacity building, exchange of experiences and economic complementarities in developing countries, as well as to the achievement of the development goals in the rural world.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the need to support national efforts of African countries where the most vulnerable rural poor are suffering from poverty, hunger and epidemics. It is the responsibility of the international community to help Africa overcoming these very serious problems. The international community, including all its stakeholders, has to strengthen its efforts to

support the priorities of NEPAD. Measures and actions have to be undertaken to help Africa concretizing NEPAD initiatives, in particular those aimed at improving market access, investment and diversification as well as at improving agriculture and food security, and combating HIV/AIDS.

I thank you for your attention.

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