

Statement by Ambassador Bagher Asadi, Chairman of the Group of 77 (2001), Islamic Republic of Iran, at the Special Unit for TCDC Retreat 2002

**Merrill Lynch Conference and Training Center, Plainsboro, New Jersey
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Madame Safiatou Ba-N'Daw,
Dear Colleagues,

Let me, first of all, thank you, Madame Safiatou, for the very kind words. Brief as they were, nevertheless, the message is an important message. I should take the opportunity to express my deep gratitude to the Special Unit for TCDC, and to the UNDP, for the kind invitation. It is a great pleasure to be here with you all, more so that Ambassador Milos Alcalay, the real Chairman of the Group of 77 – the current Chairman - is also here with us, and also the distinguished Deputy Minister of Science and Technology of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The fact that both of us, the outgoing Chairman – to be precise, the “out-gone” Chairman by five days – and the current Chairman, has a symbolic message; it signifies two things. One, continuity in the Group’s chairmanship. In fact, last Wednesday, the two of us co-chaired an UNCTAD meeting on trade. And on Friday, during the turnover ceremony, we broke with the tradition and because of President Chavez’ presence, all of us, the outgoing and the incoming chairmanship, were at the podium the whole time. The second message signifies the importance we in the Group of 77 attach to the work of the Special Unit. And in a bigger sense, the importance we attach to the work of the UNDP as the main agency of the United Nations system for operational activities, which, as we all know, has always been so close to our heart in the developing world. That is how we have looked at the UNDP and its activities in support of development for more than three decades and we continue to view it the same way, despite the fact that its traditional developmental projects and activities as we used to favour have been changing towards more upstream activities. The attachment is there nonetheless.

It is within this framework that the special relationship between the Group of 77 and the Special Unit should be conceived and looked at. We are really appreciative of all the valuable support that the Unit has provided to the Group and to the Office of the Chairman over the past years. We would definitely like to see the Unit continue its work as well as the excellent relationship with us. I believe this four-day retreat is a very useful occasion and opportunity for review and assessment of its activities. Apart from these points of a general nature, I suppose all of us are fully aware of how things have gone in the past and why, so there is hardly any need for me to go over the past. What is important to note is that things have changed and keep changing, for us in the Group of 77 and for you, the Special Unit. What I usually refer to as the bigger picture out there in reality has been changing; we have been dealing with the process of globalization and all that it implies for all of us.

With these words by way of introduction, let me now turn to the draft report we have before us: “The Restructuring of SU/TCDC: A concept paper presenting the Unit’s new vision”. I have read the bigger part of the draft, and I have found the “Executive Summary” very interesting and rich – which is further expounded in the first part of the paper. On the one hand, it reflects the very difficult situation the Special Unit finds itself in the face of expanding mandates and dwindling resources. And on the other, and simultaneously, what I found in the Executive Summary and in the first part reflects a very realistic, objective appraisal of that difficult situation; of looking directly into the eyes of the reality. I find this candid approach and its objective presentation commendable and I am sure it will prove enlightening and helpful in articulating the new vision.

Now - at the beginning of 2002 – when we look from the viewpoint of the group of 77 at the Special Unit and its status within the broader framework of the UNDP and its activities, we are reminded of the provision in the Havana Programme of Action – which reads as follows:

“Invited the Administrator of the UNDP to strengthen the TCDC Unit as the UN focal point for South-South cooperation through the preservation of its separate identity and the provision of adequate resources to ensure the full implementation of decisions of the South Summit under its sphere of competence and to enable it to carry out its relevant mandates and responsibilities”.

In this provision, adopted less than two years ago in April 2000, the Unit is viewed as the focal point within the UN family for South-South cooperation. Within the same framework and approach, we now have the Tehran Consensus, which represents a higher level of understanding and agreement at the level of the whole Group on such cooperation, and particularly on the strategic priority areas.

I fully agree with the very straight- forward emphasis in the Executive Summary and the first part of the draft that the Special Unit needs a strategic perspective. The mere admission that the Unit has been lacking such a perspective is a very welcome approach. Without a strategic perspective the Unit cannot properly define its position within the UNDP House and within the bigger UN family, or for that matter, its relations with others, whether other agencies and institutions in the family, or the wide range of relevant stakeholders. And we all know that part of the change that I referred to earlier deals with the question of stakeholders, which has expanded and grown over time, and keeps growing.

Turning to the second part of the paper, one could say as the first impression – let me add, as an amateur - that the proposed restructuring seems somehow ambitious. Well, to be very frank, I do not see the trend of declining resources a good and positive sign and indication. It is not at all clear how one could reach from a declining trend to such a substantial increase, as the proposed restructuring would entail. With due consideration for the deliberations in the Fifth Committee and the UNDP Executive Board, I really do not know what tangible indications there for the political will of the donor community to support such an increase in the needed resources. It is not for me to delve into the details of the proposed restructuring. You have discussed within your own house and come up with the proposal. I am here to give you my impressions.

Let me also refer to another on-going process; that is, the preparatory process for the Financing for Development. The last session of the PrepCom is now taking place in New York and will continue until next Friday, January 25th. All of you know how much the developing world has invested in this process for over two decades and how important for us it is to have a real, substantive outcome from the Monterrey Conference. But, as you know well, it is a very difficult process and much more difficult at this stage to predict any particular outcome coming out of Mexico. Obviously, none of us is in a position to speculate how the Monterrey outcome will affect the resources for operational activities of the United Nations in general, much less the resources for South-South cooperation. That inevitably leads us to the rather obvious conclusion that we should – you should – be looking for new resources from innovative sources.

Having addressed the paper in very broad and general terms, let me just give you a few overriding considerations on how we look at the Special Unit and its work in the future. We in the Group of 77 definitely would like to see the Unit act as the focal point for South-South cooperation, in a meaningful, effective manner, within the United Nations system, and to help the Group of 77 in implementing its agreed decisions in this area. The Unit should be in a position to effectively coordinate the activities of the whole UN family in this area. The mandate we have from Havana and now complemented by the Tehran Consensus is clear and provides us and you with a very sound basis for future policy planning and implementation.

We in the Group would be very happy to see the Special Unit consolidated, strengthened and expanded. There is no doubt about it. But, let me very frank with you. The actual dimension of the proposed restructuring should be articulated and defined in a manner that would not – even by the most remote implication – give the North, the donor community, the impression that South-South cooperation is all the South is looking for and pursuing and that it could replace or substitute North-South relations and cooperation. They should not get the impression – even inadvertently – that they are off the hook. And that

they just give you something in the form of resources for South-South cooperation and then tell you Adios. It is of utmost importance that the complementarity of South-South cooperation to North-South cooperation be always emphasized and kept right at the center of our attention and policy planning. A radical, sharp increase in the needed resources for a restructured Unit, a far outcry from what could be considered a reasonable increase, could give the other parties the wrong impression.

Dear Colleagues,

All of you have pursued the deliberations of the Second Committee in this area, on agenda item 99, particularly 99(b). We had a good Secretary-General' report and very fruitful discussions in the Committee and finally, a good resolution. I am sure you have either read or heard about the statement I made there on behalf of the Group. That represents the Group's collective look at the South-South cooperation and the status of the Special Unit in this regard. I do not deem it necessary to add anything here.

Now that I am talking to you on South-South cooperation, let me share with you President Khatami's reflection in his message to the IFCC-X meeting in Tehran. In his message, my President emphasized the imperative of the elements for the Group's continued work in the future; realism, objectivity, future-looking determination, creativity and a certain degree of boldness. Last Friday, in his farewell statement to the Group of 77, my Foreign Minister drew on the President's words and placed particular singular emphasis on the element of boldness. And, I have to add, that Minister Kharrazi was addressing the perennial question of the ultimate responsibility for development when he stressed the necessity of the element of boldness for the Group of 77, and what we, developing countries, should expect from ourselves and from others in so far as achieving development is concerned.

Let me end my remarks on this point and just add that all of us will be well served should we keep these elements in mind in whatever each of us happen to be doing. That is all I wanted to share with you today. And I look forward to continue my exchanges on this important issue with Madame Safiatou and you my Dear colleagues.

Thank you very much, for the opportunity and for your kind indulgence.