



DECLARATION BY MR. MOHAMMED ARROUCHI, COUNSELLOR, ON BEHALF OF THE G77 AND CHINA, AT THE OPENING OF THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (HAVANA, CUBA, 25 AUGUST - 5 SEPTEMBER 2003)

Madam President,

Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the G77 and China, to thank you personally, and through you, Madam Chair, I would like also to thank the Government and the people of Cuba for their warm welcome and hospitality and for their endeavors to host this very important session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

On behalf of the G77 and China I would like also to congratulate you as well as the other members of the Bureau for your election to lead the work of this very important session of the Conference of the Parties (COP).

I would like also to thank the outgoing members of the Bureau for their dedication, able leadership and effective contribution to attain the objectives of our Convention.

Likewise, I would like to extend our thanks to the Executive Secretary of UNCCD, Ambassador Hama Arba Diallo and all the members of the Secretariat of the Convention for their hard work and dedication to serve the Parties in the implementation of the Convention.

I want also to seize this opportunity on behalf of the G77 and China to express our thanks to the Government and people of Cuba for hosting this session of COP and for their highly appreciated hospitality. I am pretty sure that together we will endeavor to attain the objectives we are aspiring for in this beautiful country.

Our thanks go as well to the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany for the constant support it is providing to facilitate the Mission of the Permanent Secretariat of the Convention in Bonn.

Madam President,

Despite many successful and continuing efforts of the International Community since the entry into force of the Convention and the fact that some progress has been made in the implementation of its provisions, desertification worldwide is unfortunately still worsening. An effective global monitoring is therefore critically needed to better understand and control the process and problems of desertification as a global phenomenon which hinders the endeavors towards the attainment of sustainable development goals and targets.

Combating desertification, as was underlined in Chapter 12 of Agenda 21, is one of the strategic tasks in the field of environment and sustainable development, which should be continuously pursued.

In this context, we would like to recall that the WSSD Plan of Implementation which has unanimously recognized that "eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, particularly for developing countries", reaffirmed the crucial role of combating desertification to attain this objective.

Indeed, in para 7L, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation states that, "combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought and floods through measures such as improved use of climate and weather information and forecasts, early warning systems, land and natural resource management, agricultural practices and ecosystem conservation in order to reverse current trends and minimize degradation of land and water resources, including through the provision of adequate and predictable financial resources to implement the U.N. Convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, as one of the tools, for poverty eradication".

And here I would like to emphasize that in our deliberations we should be guided by the following principle: how to render this Convention an effective tool in order to alleviate the burden of the millions of people suffering from the consequences of this global phenomenon, desertification.

In order to preserve the spirit of Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Commission on sustainable development, as the high level organ of the U.N. system on sustainable development issues, has during its 11th session defined a multi-year program of work which identified desertification as one of the issues in the thematic clusters to be subject to an evaluation during the 2008-2009 cycle which comprises a review year and a policy year.

I would like to recall in this respect that the issue of desertification will be subject during the year 2008 to an overall evaluation of the measures taken with regard to combat this global phenomenon, while during the policy year in 2009, additional measures will be endorsed in order to reinforce the process of implementation with regard to combating desertification.

The main objective of this evaluation is to identify the constraints in the implementation of measures pertaining to combat desertification in order to enhance the process of implementation through the adoption of additional measures.

In this respect, it should be recalled that the theme of desertification will be tackled together with other interrelated issues like agriculture, rural development, land, drought and also Africa. Desertification, together with these issues will be examined in conjunction with other cross-cutting issues, mainly poverty eradication and means of implementation.

Madam President,

The rationale behind this presentation of the outcomes of the WSSD is to underline the importance of an effective synergy between the Secretariat of the Convention and the Commission on Sustainable Development in order to reinforce the process of implementation with regard to the measures taken to combat desertification.

Consequently, an effective synergy between the Secretariat of the Convention and the CSD Secretariat is of paramount importance.

In this respect, the role of the Committee on the review of the implementation of the Convention as well as that of the Committee on Science and Technology will be crucial in order to reinforce the implementation process of the Convention.

Madam President,

Keeping in mind what has been said, we believe that the work of this session should build on the recent developments with regard to sustainable development issues and seize the momentum generated in order to ensure that through a frank, open and transparent dialogue we can together identify the best ways and means to ensure that our Convention will be implemented in a way

which will contribute significantly to the attainment of the goal of poverty eradication while halting the degradation of the environment.

Madam President,

Allow me on behalf of the Group of 77 and China to touch briefly and in general terms on some of the issues under our consideration:

" With regard to the proposed program and budget for the biennium 2004-2005, we are of the view that the guiding principle in our discussion should not be confined to the question of how much or less the budget should be, but rather how effective we would like the Secretariat to be in carrying out its mandate at a time when the efforts of the Secretariat are shifting from a focus on awareness raising and assisting Parties in the formulation of National Action Programs (NAPs) to the implementation and partnership building processes.

We believe that the proposed program and budget for the biennium 2004-2005 reflects the provisions of the Convention and the decisions of the COP, and therefore deserves to be supported.

" With regard to Regional Coordination Units (RCUs), the Conference of the Parties during its fifth session recognized the importance of regional coordination and the value of the efforts at the regional level currently identified as the "Regional Coordination Units" initiative.

Keeping in mind that the trend in the U.N. system is to decentralize its development and technical assistance programs to the regions, we believe that the RCUs initiative will undoubtedly allow for a more effective implementation of the goals and objectives of the Convention at the regional level.

Since the RCUs have demonstrated an ability to respond to the Parties' needs and to integrate the UNCCD activities in the regional platforms relating to sustainable development goals, the RCUs efforts deserve to be supported and strengthened.

" Concerning the Global Environment Facility as a financial mechanism to the Convention, we are witnessing a turning point in the history of the Convention and in this context I will suffice with stating the following:

This session will be called to take a very important decision relating to the offer already made by the GEF to become a financial mechanism to the Convention. We look forward to a decision with a clear and enabling wording in this respect;

We would like also to emphasize that the allocation of resources by GEF to the pertinent programs should be guided by the Conference of the Parties, as the main policy-making organ.

" With regard to the Global Mechanism, Madam President, and while recognizing the difficult context of constraints and multiple directives to meet challenging needs and demands from developing countries, the Global Mechanism which is presently at a turning point, should, inter alia, set clear cut priorities on the basis of the orientation and directives given by the COP so as to ensure an effective contribution to the implementation of the Convention. To this end, a renewed support, particularly from the GM key partners (IFAD, UNDP and the World Bank) is of paramount importance to assist the GM in mobilizing complementary financing to maximize the opportunities offered by the GEF as a financial mechanism for the implementation of the Convention.

The GM's new role should consist in assisting developing countries through the establishment of reliable and durable partnerships to translate their sustainable land use and management

objectives into reality.

We would like to commend in this respect the GM team for their hard work and urge the enhancement of the work of the GM in mobilizing investment resources and grasping emerging opportunities for new and additional public and private financing in developing countries.

Lastly, Madam President,

Since presently the international community has at its disposal a solid repertoire of commitments with regard to sustainable development including combating desertification, the path to sustainability and to sustainable land management goes through a strong political will to engage into long term strategies of implementation of commonly defined goals and targets with respect to combating the challenging global phenomenon of desertification.

The G77 and China, stands ready to engage into a constructive dialogue to this end to ensure that the results of this Conference will be achieved in your beautiful country.

Thank you very much Madam President.