STATEMENT DELIVERED BY NADIA M. OSMAN, MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY, PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE SUDAN TO THE UN, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA DURING THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PREPARATORY MEETING OF THE SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: LAND
(New York, 25 February 2009)

Madam Chairperson,

1. I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for the comprehensive report on the thematic area of "Land" presented to this Commission, which will help inform our discussions on this issue during this important session.

2. Sustainable land management should be promoted as a means to achieve eradication of poverty and to promote sustainable development. Land is closely linked to sustainable livelihoods and efforts to eradicate poverty. Sustainable land management also plays an important role in agriculture and rural development's implementation of an integrated approach to increasing food production and enhancing food security. The integrative view prescribed in chapter 10 of Agenda 21 is yet to be implemented in the scale required. This can only be fully realized through the adoption of holistic approaches to sustainable land management in public policies. It is in this light that we must renew our resolve to overcome barriers and constraints and promote the wide adoption of tools for sustainable land management, renewing our political will and commitment at national and international level to implement effective sustainable land management.

3. The broad concept of "land" encompasses natural resources such as soil, water, the use of biological and other mineral resources. International cooperation in this area should thus be directed by Principle 2 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which recognizes the sovereign right of States to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies.

4. The challenges related to land identified in our previous sessions remain daunting. They are inextricably linked to the difficulties we face in the other thematic areas under consideration by the CSD during the current cycle: agriculture, rural development, desertification, drought, and Africa. We must adequately reflect these linkages in devising solutions and options for tackling these challenges.

Madam Chairperson,

5. Land degradation affects in particular the poor in developing countries. These processes are further aggravated by the impacts of climate change on resources such as

soil and water availability. Preventing land degradation is more efficient and cost-efficient than rehabilitating degraded lands. There is an urgent need for policies that address the direct and indirect drivers of degradation, such as erosion, salinization, pollution and urbanization. Sustainable land management practices should be promoted alongside capacity at the national level. Efforts towards rehabilitation of degraded lands should also be stepped up. This involves facilitating the recovery of the soil's physical integrity, improving the nutrient status and increasing the amount of organic matter in the soil. Incentives to reduce land degradation should take into account that such efforts are inextricably linked to poverty eradication and employment creation in developing countries. There is also an urgent need for effective, coherent and comprehensive activities by the UN system to assist developing countries in implementing sustainable land management.

6. The UNCCD remains the most important legally binding instrument to tackle desertification and land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid regions. The G-77/China reiterates its full support for the Convention's activities and reaffirms the importance of its 10-year Strategic Plan and Framework.

7. Land tenure security and equitable access to land are key for sustainable development and poverty reduction. Land title deeds are central for ensuring tenure security. It is urgent to extend the coverage of cadastral systems and programmes for accessible land registration, particularly in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America, particularly to the urban and rural poor. To enhance the long-term stability of land registration systems, national registration systems should also be modernized through digital technologies. Those technologies should gradually replace paper-based manual titling systems. International support should be provided to overcome financial and technical constraints in the implementation of such systems in developing countries.

Madam Chairperson,

8. Land reform policies should be an integral part of strategies to reduce social and economic disparities and poverty through improving access to land while also stimulating rural economies. The sustainable land management approach should be a guiding principle in these efforts, with a view to protecting the natural resource base while promoting sustainable development in rural communities. In this context, the role of women in decision-making in the areas of land management and planning as well as access to land should be emphasized. Preference should also be given to rural women in social protection programmes related to land.

9. Sustainable land use, particularly in the planning of rural and urban areas of developing countries, should be enhanced. Within the developing world, there is already a trade-off between industrial development, housing, and the economic use of arable land. Key to solving this problem is the sharing of expertise, in particular the experiences of developed countries, as well as success cases of developing countries.

10. Sustainable land management is also a key component in solving the food crisis. The improvement of land production activities and the use of land resources are imperative for long-range solutions to food security. Access to land by smallholder farmers, incentives to invest in maintenance of land resources, developing of a thriving agro-industrial sector are key towards ensuring balance between the environment, rural livelihoods and food productivity. Cooperatives should be promoted as a tool to enhance the ability of smallholder and family farmers to participate in the food markets at all levels.

11. Land-use planning and sustainable land management are also critical components of strategies to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change. Support should be given for the appropriate activities in developing countries, particularly those with vulnerable areas and ecosystems.

12. There is also an urgent need for enhancing the productivity of land. Tools and technologies for sustainable land management need to be more broadly applied and adapted to local conditions

Madam Chairperson,

13. Strengthening national capacities in implementing an integrated approach to land management is crucial. Ownership of all related activities should remain in the hands of national authorities. The establishment of knowledge management network and database of land experts should benefit countries in achieving optimum land use sustainability. These should include all relevant stakeholders.

14. Technical capacity in sustainable land management techniques and technologies that lead to increase in productivity should be improved. Dissemination to farmers in developing countries of new and existing technologies and adapted sustainable agricultural practices should be scaled up. South-South cooperation, as well as triangular and North-South cooperation, in this context, should play a central role.

15. Exchanges of information on new and improved technologies and experience are crucial for developing countries. International collaboration in frontier areas of science and technology, such as the development of new and improved varieties of crops to face changing weather patterns and water cycles in light of climate change, should be further encouraged. Targeted research is needed to reduce pressures on land resources. The role of land as carbon reservoir or as carbon sinks, in this context, is one area in which further scientific studies in developing countries are needed. In this context, the international community should also provide incentives, through the appropriate mechanisms under the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol, for carbon sequestration through afforestation and reforestation in developing countries, which should have a positive impact on rehabilitating degraded land areas.

16. Financing remains the main hurdle in this equation. The demand for financial resources greatly supersedes the availability, despite, as stated in the Secretary General's

report in 2008 "an increasing range of financing mechanisms" which stimulated integrated land resources management in the last decade. Financing is required to provide the initial start up costs, which often exceed the capacity of small-scale farmers to acquire sustainable land management technologies and shift to sustainable practices. More research is needed on the impact of direct economic incentives to foster sustainable management of land through ecosystem services. This research should be carried out in conformity with WTO regulations, in particular the Agreement on Agriculture.

Madam Chairperson,

17. A larger share of ODA should be directed to the agricultural sector and in particular to smallholder farmers. But ODA in itself will not match the challenges if subsidies and restricted market access continue to discriminate against land production from developing countries.

18. The distorting subsidies applied at huge levels in some developed economies lead to market distortions that have a dire impact on the management of land resources in developing countries, crippling the development of productive agricultural activities in many areas. Discussions on improvement of land management should also pay special attention to the negative impacts of agricultural subsidies and should present policy options for their complete removal.

19. According to the latest MDG report, the global food crisis is partly the result of domestic agricultural subsidies and tariff protection by developed countries, which for many years have discouraged agricultural production in developing countries. Developed countries' total support to their own domestic agricultural sectors remained more than three times higher than the ODA of developed countries. This acts as a disincentive to agricultural production in developing regions and undermines ODA's broad objective of supporting development. Market access for agricultural products from developing countries should also be an integral part of solutions aimed at disseminating sustainable land management.

Thank you.