



Statement

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On behalf of the Arab Group

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The Commission on Sustainable Development

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Mm. Chairperson,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Arab Group, which also associates itself with the statement given by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the G-77 and China. At the outset, allow me to commend you and the members of the bureau on your efforts during the Intergovernmental Preparatory Meetings for this commission, and we are looking forward to cooperating with you as you direct our work during this session; we wish you success. I also wish to thank the Secretary General for presenting the reports on the thematic issues which will be addressed during this session.

Mm. Chair,

The Arab Group emphasizes the importance of the work of the commission on sustainable development and the persistence to ensure the balance between economic development, social development and environmental protection, since they are all interrelated and interdependent pillars of sustainable development. The Group emphasizes the need to implement the international commitments contained in agenda 21, the Johannesburg plan of implementation and other commitments and internationally agreed goals in accordance to Rio principles, in particular the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

This session of the commission on sustainable development coincides with a series of important and sensitive developments, foremost among these, are the global economic and financial crisis, volatile food prices, the adverse impacts of climate change and the serious implications of these crises on developing countries, especially the least developed countries (LDCs) and African countries.

The themes of agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa, which this session will consider, are subjects of great importance for the countries of the Arab Group. In this regard, ESCWA had prepared an implementation report for the Arab Region which was adopted by the Arab Ministerial Council on environment affairs

at its 9th session held in Cairo in December 2007. The Group also notes the importance of the outcomes of the Arab Economic, Social and Development Summit held in Kuwait in January 2009 and its resolutions on the international financial crisis, food security as well as a broad range of economic, social and development issues.

Mm. Chair,

The efforts and activities made during the past two decades to achieve sustainable development in the Arab region, have accomplished considerable progress. However, there are still challenges and obstacles that hinder the fulfillment of the desired objectives.

All Arab countries suffer from the volatility of food prices, which has led to expanding the circle of poverty and undermined the achievements of the Arab countries in poverty eradication. The Arab countries see that the international community should continue to confront this crisis and address the causes that lead to it. In this regard, the Arab Group is looking carefully at the Global Partnership Initiative on Agriculture and Food Security. It affirms that any dialogue regarding this partnership should be carried out in a transparent manner and with the participation of all countries.

The group calls for the increase of investments in the agricultural sector and strengthening south-south cooperation and triangular cooperation. It also stresses the importance of the international community providing immediate assistance to developing countries that most vulnerable to this crisis. The group also calls for providing assistance to developing countries, including Arab countries, to increase agricultural productivity through facilitating the transfer of advanced knowledge and technology in agriculture and agricultural industries and through reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers which developed countries impose on developing countries' agricultural products. The Group also wishes to point out the importance of utilizing agricultural wastes for the production of bio-fuel, and the importance to transfer the technology in this field to developing countries. The Group welcomes the proposal of organizing a World Summit on Food Security in November 2009 in Rome, on the occasion of the 36th session of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Parts of the Arab region continue to suffer from significant obstacles facing the process of development, as it is the case in the occupied Arab territories where the occupation has caused severe damage to the natural resources of its land and water, while the Israeli aggression on Lebanon in June 2006 resulted in limiting the possibilities of utilizing the natural resources because of war remnants where Lebanese farmers suffer from cluster bombs dropped during the war. This is in addition to the destructive environmental effects of the oil slick dispersed over the Lebanese and Syrian shores and the problem of landmines which were planted in Arab lands during the Second World War.

The continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands and the Syrian Golan since 1967 has led to serious deterioration in the sectors of agriculture, rural development, water and land in those areas. The unlawful practices committed by Israel,

the occupying power, such as the confiscation of land, the illegal construction of settlements and the wall on it, the systematic large-scale destruction of agricultural lands and farms, the uprooting of countless trees, and the restriction imposed on Palestinian and Syrian farmers such as preventing them from reaching their lands and selling their produce and depriving them from their water resources by forcibly changing their course, in addition to the contamination of the arable lands by burying the garbage and industrial wastes in it and dumping the sewage of the settlements on these lands, and other lengthy lists of practices, have had dire economic and social effects on the population. These practices undermine the chances for development and cause a large increase in the rates of poverty, unemployment and food insecurity. In this context, the recent Israeli aggression on the Gaza strip, which took place after 18 months of a strangulating siege, has caused wide destruction of all infrastructures in the strip including farm lands and water networks. It rendered the whole population in Gaza totally dependant on food assistance from the outside. This is an unacceptable situation that we must end and not allow to continue. Therefore it is incumbent upon the Commission on Sustainable Development to pay special attention to the issue of foreign occupation and call for the halt of such illegal practices, which have negative effects on economic and social development and violate human dignity and values.

Mm. Chair,

The Arab countries, like all developing countries, are more vulnerable to climate change and its adverse impact on sustainable development including in the Arab region. Changes such as the recession of agricultural products and green areas, intensification of drought and desertification, flooding of low land coasts due to a rising sea level such as Nile Delta in Egypt, and the severe shrinkage of water in the Dead sea, lead to negative effects on biodiversity, decrease in food security, and jeopardizing essential economic investments, all of which have severe negative social outcomes. In this context, the 25th Ministerial Session of ESCWA, held in Sana'a in May 2008, has adopted a resolution to prepare an assessment of the effects of this phenomenon on economic and social development in the region, and to develop an Arab Framework Action Plan for climate change.

On the regional level, Arab countries are making efforts to address climate change. These efforts require the support of the International community in the areas of mitigation, adaptation, transfer of technology and capacity building. A number of developing countries, including members of the Arab Group, have taken prominent steps in making practical and effective use of renewable energy sources. The United Arab Emirates seeks to host the headquarters of the International Renewable Energy Agency which will have a positive effect on developing and Arab countries.

The Arab Group emphasizes the necessity of implementing all commitments under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, and supporting the efforts of developing countries, including the Arab countries, in addressing climate change, and operationalizing the Adaptation Fund. The Arab Group hopes to reach a consensus regarding post 2012 negotiations which will be finalized in Copenhagen later this year. In this regard, we are looking forward to the High Level Meeting on Climate Change, which

will be held on 22 September 2009 prior to the opening of the general debate of the General Assembly at its 64th session, and hope it will contribute to a productive outcome in Copenhagen.

Mm. Chair,

The Arab Group calls for the provision of new and additional financial resources for development, and also calls for a just international trade and financial systems, elimination of restrictions on the transfer of knowledge and technology to developing countries, including the Arab countries, and focused efforts on capacity building in those countries. In this context, the Arab Group draws attention, with concern, to the decrease in ODA, and calls upon developed countries to fulfill their commitments for the implementation of the international development agenda, in compliance with the outcomes of the Doha Conference on financing for development. We look forward to the High Level Meeting on the financial and economic crisis and its impact on development to be held from 1-3 June 2009, which represents an opportunity to deal with all issues related to the current crisis. The Arab Group emphasizes the importance of transparency, and inclusiveness in the international efforts to ensure the stability of the international financial system and to get out of this crisis.

Mm. Chair,

The Arab Group sees that although the Chair's negotiating text took note of some of the suggestions introduced by the Arab Group, it failed to mention a number of issues of high importance to developing countries, including the Arab countries. Such issues were mentioned in the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of the Sudan on behalf of the G77 and China. We specifically draw attention to a very important issue mentioned in the various statements of the G77 and the Arab Group during the preparatory meetings to the 17th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development as well as in the 16th session of the commission. Those statements addressed the economic, social and environmental obstacles facing people living under foreign occupation. In this regard, the Arab Group stresses that it is very important that the text of the final document of this session reflects the question of the economic, social and environmental obstacles facing the peoples living under foreign occupation while they endeavor to achieve sustainable development.

Mm. Chair,

The Commission on Sustainable Development should not distance itself from addressing the special needs of any people, in particular those living under foreign occupation, especially during these difficult times the international economy is going through. It is incumbent on all of us to realize that the protection of economic rights and the right to development of people under foreign occupation should be an urgent international goal until the repugnant phenomenon of occupation is eliminated. In this context, the Arab Group emphasizes that it is necessary to incorporate the above concerns into the Chair's negotiating text during the work of the commission in its 17th session.

Thank you.