

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

*Check Against Delivery



STATEMENT

by

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“Achieving Sustainable Development”.

“Promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development, taking into account current challenges”

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Mr President
Excellencies
Distinguished delegates

At the outset, allow me on behalf of my delegation to congratulate you, and other members of the bureau, on the excellent manner in which you are conducting the work of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). We associate ourselves with the statement made earlier by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We also thank the Secretary-General for the informative reports prepared for this session.

Mr President

This substantive session has witnessed yet another milestone in the life of ECOSOC, in that we participated in the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) for the first time since the adoption of General Assembly resolution A/61/16 of 09 January 2007 on the strengthening of the Council. On the other hand, the Annual Ministerial (AMR) is celebrating its second birthday the age at which the AMR must have already started to run. The two new functions of the Council must elevate it to the position it was meant to occupy within the United Nations.

Mr President

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 we have committed ourselves to addressing the challenges of sustainable development through, inter alia, implementing measures related to the three pillars, namely economic development, social development and environmental protection in an integrated and coordinated manner. This, we believed was the best way to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. However, nearly ten years down the line, we are still being confronted by poverty; especially in rural areas where more than 75% of our populations still live. Land degradation, loss of biological diversity, desertification and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption still continue unabated. At the same time, urban poverty is also increasing accompanying the phenomenon of rural/urban migration.

The fact that poverty remains a global challenge signals the urgency with which individual countries and the international community at large need to seek sustainable development oriented solutions to rural development.

Mr President

While studies continue to show that the majority of rural inhabitants overwhelmingly depend on agriculture for their livelihood, agriculture has been neglected for quite a long time despite the commitments made at Johannesburg to increase support to the agricultural sector; to improve productivity with particular attention to small-scale and women farmers; to ensure food security and increase the access to adequate food and nutrition; and to develop Africa into a net exporter of agricultural products.

Let me hasten to say that past ill-conceived policies advice by some international institutions have contributed significantly to the predicament we find ourselves today. Governments in the developing world were advised to pursue neo-liberal policies and leave agriculture to the whims of the market. This, while those in the developed world were getting deeply involved in subsidizing their agricultural sectors both at the production and trading levels. No wonder, poverty became more and synonymous to the developing world. To tackle poverty and hunger, we must therefore go back to agriculture and rural development.

Mr President

Namibia has continued to pursue a sustainable economic growth and development agenda through the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources, and the implementation of sound environmental management policies. Sustainable Development is enshrined at all key levels of our National Planning Processes and this is reflected in our long-term development plan, "Vision 2030", as well as in our Medium Term Development Plans. In addition, our Government continues to strengthen institutional arrangements to pursue integrated and coordinated approaches to sustainable development.

Mr President

We are pursuing a holistic approach to rural development in which attempts to boost agricultural production are accompanied by measures to improve

access to social infrastructure and services. The Government's rural water supply programme has enabled 93% of rural communities to have access to clean and safe water, 20% higher than the world percentage. Access to infrastructure is being supported by a non-means-tested social safety net that provides monthly social grants to all those of sixty years and above, the disabled, orphans and other vulnerable children to ensure access to food and other critical services for these vulnerable groups.

Mr President

While achieving sustainable development in Namibia is at the core of the National Planning Process, current challenges are threatening to reverse what we have so far achieved. The effects of climate change and climatic variability are constantly confronting us. Devastating floods that have affected parts of our country earlier this year, came just on the heels of a severe drought last year. The combination of the two has negatively affected the already low food production in our arid country, besides the destruction of much needed infrastructure in the affected regions.

On the other hand, current skyrocketing food prices have negatively impacted developing countries and for net food and oil-importing developing countries, like Namibia, they are threatening many households, especially in rural areas. Food price increases are also compounded by the ever-increasing oil prices over which nobody seems to have control. These are further being exacerbated by the general slow down of the global economy, inflation pressure and general financial volatility.

To mitigate the effects of the food price increases, our Government has taken some emergency measures to counter the threat to human life. A number of staple foodstuffs have been exempted from value added taxes, so as to lessen the burden on vulnerable households. Our school feeding programme has also been extended to all rural schools in order to prevent malnutrition among our school-going children.

Mr President

The current food crisis calls for concerted efforts at the international level to increase investment in agricultural production, the transfer of technology and capacity building as provided for in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Current crises are a call on the international community to

relook at the structural defects of the world economy. In this regard, we call on ECOSOC to play its coordinating role as the social and economic arm of the United Nations. ECOSOC should continue to strengthen its policy advice role while providing a forum for exchange of ideas and good practices. This should also include the process of addressing the development needs and aspirations of middle-income countries in which close to half of the world poor live.

I thank you.