

UNITED NATIONS



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**Statement by  
MR. SHA ZUKANG  
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TO THE SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
ON THE ITEM “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”  
New York, 27 October 2008**

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

In this world of deepening globalization, our national economies and financial systems have never been more linked. So are our ecosystems. This interconnectedness among the economic, social and natural worlds underpins the three-pillar framework of sustainable development. To grow our economy, address social inequities and protect the ecosystems, it is imperative that we continue to implement an integrated, holistic strategy.

Fittingly, today, the General Assembly, in this Committee, commences its consideration of the item on sustainable development.

As the global financial credit dries up, our natural capital – our life-supporting ecosystems – are under unprecedented assault from unsustainable consumption and production. This continuing erosion of the “natural stocks” of wealth poses a challenge to the global development agenda as daunting and urgent as the financial crisis.

Two-thirds of the world’s ecosystems are degraded and being used unsustainably. Between 5 to 20 per cent of plant and animal species are threatened with extinction. Per capita water availability is declining globally and more than 2.4 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation. This year over two million people are dying prematurely due to air pollution.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

Despite recent moderation in global food and fuel prices, prospects for agricultural production and household food security remain precarious. A large number of developing countries are struggling to address the macroeconomic fallout of high domestic food prices and inflationary pressure. The easing in fuel prices has not translated into lower input costs for farmers. The challenge facing Africa is especially serious.

The global food crisis, leading to an additional 44 million malnourished people this year, is not merely a crisis of crops – it epitomizes the failure of the international community on several inter-related fronts. We have not taken good care of the land and water that nurtured our civilization. We have not invested in agriculture. Plant science, which created the miraculous

Green Revolution in Asia in the 1960s, is falling behind. And we have failed to empower women, who more often than not, are the farmers who put meals on the tables.

The Secretary-General acted quickly, setting up a global food security task force to coordinate UN actions in a range of areas, both short-term and long-run. During its review session this past May, the Commission on Sustainable Development identified the barriers and obstacles. We look forward to guidance by the General Assembly on the complex but important negotiations for policy decisions at CSD-17.

We also know that climate change will greatly complicate our efforts to ensure global food security in decades to come. Even in the midst of the current global financial crisis, it is essential to maintain our momentum on climate change, including through ambitious action on energy.

The small island developing states (SIDS) remain vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as well as to natural disasters and to the vicissitudes of the global market. The need for increased financial and capacity-building support to SIDS for strengthening their overall resilience is more urgent today than ever before, as stressed in the Secretary-General's reports on further implementation of the Mauritius Strategy and the protection of the Caribbean Sea.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

The challenges to the UN development agenda are inter-linked and interdependent. They threaten the achievement of MDGs through cascading effects on global food, water and other natural resources, and on our children's and mothers' health. Piecemeal, ad hoc solutions will not work over the long run.

The interconnectedness of our world and of the challenges ahead of us; the need for integrated solutions, for broad participation in implementation, and for a more robust global partnership for development – here are the main themes of the report before you on Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. And they are my messages to you today.

Yes, we must stabilize the global financial system. We must also invest in protecting our ecosystems, which underpin our future prosperity. We must invest more in cleaner technologies, including cleaner energy technologies. We must invest more in plant science and in agriculture. And we must invest more in future leaders – supporting more education for sustainable development. It takes financial capital, natural capital, technological and scientific capital and human capital to achieve a sustainable world.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

I wish to assure the Committee that, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, under my guidance, will continue to provide all necessary support to the work of this Committee on sustainable development.

Thank you.