



Statement
By H.E. Ambassador Ahmad Al-Jarman
Permanent Representative of the
United Arab Emirates to the United Nations
On behalf of the Arab Group
at the high level segment of the 17th session of
The Commission on Sustainable Development
New York, 13-15 May 2009

Please check against delivery

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. I would like to thank you and the members of the bureau for directing the work of this session; we wish you success.

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.

Mm. Chair

Agriculture is re-emerging as one of the priority sectors in the international agenda for development because of its relevance to food security issues. Agricultural development is reliant upon the continuous improvement of methods and practices, as well as on the development and adoption of innovations. The Group sees that it is imperative to focus on supporting scientific research and agricultural extension activities; supporting the production and marketing of agricultural products and ensuring the quality and competitiveness of these products; drafting legislation on veterinary quarantine and phytosanitary issues; increasing investments in agricultural production and achieving food security through projects and activities based on rural agricultural development priorities aimed at increasing the revenue of farmers; developing effective

means to manage risks related to investments in agriculture; enabling the participation of women in all aspects of agricultural development activities and supporting and enabling institutions specialized in early-warning systems and forecasting natural disaster risks in the agricultural sector.

As to **Rural Development**, the Arab Group sees that the problem of food insecurity is still largely a rural issue in most Arab countries. It reiterates that the problems require that countries of the region should implement policies and measures that ensure a balanced development of rural and urban areas in order to reverse the trend of rural-urban migration; financing projects for small-scale farmers and improving rural market information services and infrastructure and developing appropriate education and training tools to strengthen national capacities in rural areas as people are the driving force behind development.

Regarding **Land**, the group is of the view that policies should aim to enhancing sustainable land management practices and protecting land from degradation; increasing the use of non-conventional water resources to decrease over-dependency on conventional water resources; supporting existing scientific research institutions to make better use of remote sensing and Geographic information systems (GIS) techniques in establishing accurate and updated databases; and raising awareness and investments in water resources conservation.

In regard to **Drought**, parts of the region are currently experiencing increased numbers of severe drought episodes due to climate change. There is therefore an urgent need to design and implement comprehensive long-term drought risk management strategies that incorporate policies to improve the response to drought episodes. This will require establishing and activating drought early-warning systems in order to manage and mitigate any adverse impacts; Conducting regular field monitoring of drought cycles and identifying reliable tools to predict the correct timing of drought episodes and limiting the effects of drought episodes through the optimal use of rainwater harvesting techniques and storage facilities, such as dams and reservoirs.

DESERTIFICATION

Desertification and land degradation are constraining agricultural productivity in the Arab region.

Concerted efforts are therefore needed to combat desertification and reverse land degradation trends in the region through adopting an integrated approach to combating desertification that would; enhancing the awareness on the importance of combating desertification; enhancing the national capacities of countries of the region and supporting the establishment of joint technology transfer programmes to combat desertification.

In this context, the Group emphasizes the importance of the implementation of the United Nations convention on Desertification through providing it with the necessary resources to implement programs and projects in combating desertification in the developing countries including the Arab countries.

Africa, The Arab Group sees that Africa faces big challenges in the area of thematic cluster for the present session of the CSD. The international community made a commitment during the World Summit on Sustainable Development to support Africa in dealing with the challenges it faces within the frame of the international environment. International commitments to Africa in areas like trade, technology transference, official development Assistance and debt alleviation should be fulfilled. NEPAD represents the main executive carrier of the international community support for development in the African Continent. The international community must mobilize its efforts to support the Continent efforts in poverty reduction and hunger and in addressing the current food crisis, especially the reviving of the agricultural sector which forms the foundation for dealing with the food crisis in the continent.

Mm. Chair,

The implementation of the afore mentioned policies, in addition to the policies options to be agreed on at the conclusion of this session of the CSD, requires international cooperation and the provision of technical and financial assistance through the programs sponsored by the international effective organizations and mechanisms in thematic areas addressed in this session. In this context, the Arab Group calls for strengthening cooperation between the organizations of United Nations operating in the region and the League of Arab States in order to achieve better results in the thematic areas of this session. It also calls regional and international institutions to support the efforts of the Arab countries through joint financial and technical programs; provide technical assistance in developing and coordinating plans for combating desertification and enhancing the capacities of the Arab countries in mitigating the effects of climate change on food security, natural resources and economic development, through investing in agriculture.

Mm. Chair

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 lead 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. 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.

Thank You.