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Chairman: Mr. Asadi (Islamic Republic of Iran)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

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- (b) **Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind** (*continued*) (A/53/449)
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Panel discussion on how to achieve better coherence and improved coordination among environmental and environment-related conventions

1. **The Chairman** introduced the panellists as follows: Mr. Diallo (Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa), Mr. Zammit-Cutajar (Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) and Mr. Johnston (Convention on Biodiversity).

2. **Mr. Diallo** (Executive Secretary, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa), said that, in the negotiations on the elaboration of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the linkages between soil degradation, climate change and loss of biodiversity had been explored. In that connection, studies undertaken with the collaboration of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had demonstrated that soil degradation was accelerated, if not initiated, by climate change and that measures to control soil degradation could have a positive impact on the process of climate change.

3. In future, an effort should be made to establish linkages between soil degradation and climate change in country programmes of action formulated under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The same approach could be taken to establishing linkages between biodiversity and soil degradation at an early stage. He strongly believed that the United Nations system should refrain from imposing top-down approaches and should instead support initiatives undertaken at the country level.

4. **Mr. Zammit-Cutajar** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) said that coordination ordinarily did not occur naturally; it required intervention – in the form of managerial or intergovernmental authority, persuasion, or financial control and leverage. Moreover, coordination should be embarked on with very definite goals in mind. An overly holistic approach could be overwhelming and a deterrent to action. It was preferable to move more cautiously, and to focus on solving one problem without simultaneously creating others, as had been done when implementing the environment-related conventions.

5. Those conventions were not programmes of action, but rather legally binding instruments that established autonomous and sovereign bodies with distinct budgets; those bodies were dispersed all over the world. Such decentralization was not in itself negative, provided that the entities in question made a conscious effort to recognize the linkages among them and to avoid contradictory action. In those circumstances, the best course would be to strengthen the capacity of UNEP to fulfil the mandate conferred on it at the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, namely, to provide effective support and to respond to requests from the secretariats of the environment-related conventions, including in the areas of awareness-building, scientific assessment and the integration of activities. The United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements entrusted with that mandate did not use the term “coordination” but rather “building on linkages”. UNEP needed vital support in the areas of resources, competent staff, particularly in Nairobi, adaptation of its intergovernmental structure and development of its scientific assessment bodies and processes.

6. The intergovernmental review of the conventions, referred to in document A/53/477, might be carried out from a subject-area or programme perspective. In determining which body should undertake the review, it was vital to weigh such factors as division of labour and comparative advantage. It was difficult to determine whether progress under the three environment conventions could truly be measured in an integrated fashion. Thus far, the Second Committee had

addressed the issues of climate change, biodiversity and desertification as a cluster without truly integrating their substance, it had simply established certain overarching principles, such as equity and common but differentiated responsibilities. The General Assembly could play a vital role in establishing broad policies, and in determining the comparative advantages of various United Nations bodies and whether the review should take a general or thematic approach. In June, he had proposed that the subsidiary bodies of the Convention on Climate Change should consider forestry as a cross-cutting issue and examine the contradictions between the Montreal and Kyoto Protocols with regard to hydrofluorocarbons. His proposal had been given a cool reception.

7. Coordination at the national level, in respect of capacity-building, data collection and reporting under the various conventions was a key element. Another topic which might be explored at some stage was the fragmentation of environmental issues in distinct legal instruments as opposed to their incorporation in one umbrella convention.

8. **Mr. Johnston** (United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity) said that the governing body of the Convention on Biological Diversity sought cooperation and synergy with other bodies, including the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Second Committee. Coordination among scientific bodies, such as that of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, and the scientific advisory board of the Global Environment Facility, was also pursued. Representatives of his secretariat attended meetings convened under other environment-related conventions and had signed numerous memoranda of understanding outlining specific activities designed to enhance cooperation.

9. He agreed that coordination at the national level was crucial. The interim and final reports to be submitted shortly to the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity should generate a body of information that would be useful in identifying linkages with other conventions' secretariats. In conclusion, he stressed the importance of establishing scientifically credible goals for the implementation of conventions; the input of UNEP to that end would be invaluable.

10. **The Chairman** noted, in particular, the panellists' proposals concerning the enhancement of coordination through the establishment of cross-cutting themes, such as forestry, a promising topic for a Second Committee panel discussion within the next five years.

11. **Mr. Roesch** (Germany) said that his delegation had appreciated the panellists' emphasis on coordination at the national level and the bottom-up rather than the top-down, approach. The reference by Mr. Zammit-Cutajar to an umbrella convention was in fact very pertinent, since it was mentioned in the report of the UNEP Task Force (A/53/463). It would be interesting to hear the panellists' views on that subject.

12. **Ms. Krishna** (India) expressed appreciation for the panellists' frankness, their discussion of the potential coordinating role of UNEP, and cross-cutting approaches; and their emphasis on avoiding contradiction and on coordination at the national level. She asked them to give their assessments of the joint meetings already held between convention secretariats under the auspices of UNEP and to enumerate the issues discussed. It would also be interesting to know when they thought such bodies as the Commission on Sustainable Development and the General Assembly could do to promote synergy at the national level and the avoidance of contradiction.

13. **Mr. Ito** (Japan) said that he was struck by the infrequent references to UNEP in the various conventions, although it was understandable, since some of them, such as the Convention to Combat Desertification, had been negotiated directly under the aegis of the General Assembly. His delegation believed that the role of UNEP should perhaps be discussed in the context of UNEP reform rather than separately in the Second Committee. He wondered whether the panellists could comment on the relationship between UNEP and the various environment conventions and how its role in their implementation and coordination could be enhanced.

14. **Ms. Poulton** (United States of America) wondered how potential or actual conflicts between or among the conventions and treaties were dealt with. Noting that, increasingly, conventions and other bodies had national reporting elements that seemed to place an enormous burden on some countries, she asked what efforts were being made to reduce that burden through greater use of shared reporting and greater coordination.

15. **Mr. Plut** (Austria) wondered whether there was anything to be gained by dealing with that issue in the General Assembly and what was being done to achieve coordination.

16. **Mr. Maksimychev** (Russian Federation) wished to know which bodies were best placed to address the question of coordination and whether the time was ripe for such an exercise.

17. **Mr. Zammit-Cutajar** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) said that there might not be a need for a separate report on each convention, but that that issue had not been addressed as yet. It was really up to Governments to submit their suggestions in that regard. UNEP could help avoid conflicts and contradictions by identifying areas of potential problems or benefits. The clustering of all the conventions under one umbrella did not yet seem to be an idea whose time had come.

18. **Mr. Diallo** (Executive Secretary, Convention to Combat Desertification) said that the Convention envisaged not only national reporting but also national programming. He agreed that countries should not be overburdened with reporting requirements. That was why it had been proposed that the three secretariats should work to enable the countries concerned to have not only joint programming, but eventually joint reporting. It was in that context that he saw the roles of the Commission on Sustainable Development as well as the General Assembly and UNEP.

19. **Mr. Johnston** (Convention on Biological Diversity) said that, to date, coordination had largely been conducted on an ad hoc basis. One area of possible conflict was with the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its regime. One problem of coordination and avoiding contradictions was the lack of quantitative evidence on measures taken to reach the Convention's goals. WTO dealt in quantitative issues, and UNEP had a very important role to play in helping to provide hard scientific evidence.

20. **Mr. Canchola** (Mexico) wondered whether it would not be preferable to consolidate the regime under each Convention before thinking about an umbrella convention.

21. **Mr. Ronneberg** (Marshall Islands) stressed that intergovernmental overview was very necessary to identifying any possible problems. Until more experience was acquired with the identification of problems and possible conflicts and contradictions, it was better to deal with problems on an ad hoc basis. It was important to note that the General Assembly had agreed that UNEP should take action upon request. It would be unfortunate to rush into setting up a framework without clearly identifying any problems.

22. **Mr. Nanjira** (World Meteorological Organization) said that coordination must be seen in the light of assisting those countries that did not have the capacities and financial means to enable them to implement the provisions of the various conventions. He therefore wondered what coordination could do to help countries to measure up to expectations under instruments such as the Kyoto Protocol, *inter alia*, through financial assistance and the transfer of technology.

23. **Ms. Tavora** (Brazil) said that in her view, emphasis should first be put on how to accelerate the implementation of each convention before thinking about drawing up an umbrella convention.

24. **Ms. McBurney** (United Nations Development Programme) said that the Programme worked through the country offices to help countries to implement the Conventions. To that end, it had recently convened a conference in Israel that was closely linked to its work in capacity-building for national sustainable development strategies. The areas covered at the conference included capacity requirements, national planning requirements and information and reporting requirements.

25. **Mr. Diallo** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention on Desertification) said that the role of UNDP was fundamental at the national level, particularly in developing countries, and should be strengthened. He was confident that proper implementation of those conventions, not only by the countries but also with the support of their bilateral and multilateral partners, would help to identify the ways and means through which more ambitious actions could be undertaken. Rather than coordinating those conventions, steps should be taken to ensure that they operated well individually.

26. **Mr. Johnston** (Convention on Biological Diversity) said that there was a critical need to develop a more scientific information base. In that regard, UNEP, which had over 25 years experience, would be a source of credible scientific information.

27. **Mr. Zammit-Cutajar** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) said that UNEP had been serving his secretariat extremely well through its work on public information and that its experience in developing legal instruments had produced lessons which could be applied in the legal procedural parts of the different conventions. He agreed with the representative of Brazil that the first step was to successfully implement the different conventions.

The meeting was suspended at 4.35 p.m. and resumed at 4.40 p.m.

28. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to resume its general discussion of agenda item 94.

29. **Mr. Hajayandi** (Burundi) said that as a tropical country with a temperate climate, Burundi had not yet experienced serious problems with desertification per se. However, following the population displacements which had resulted from the socio-political crisis and armed conflict of 1993–1994, large tracts of previously uncultivated land and

wooded areas had had to be farmed. His Government had limited means and relied on support from intergovernmental organizations to meet the challenge of restoring plant cover in provinces where the displaced persons were concentrated. The Government was pursuing its objectives for the prevention of drought and desertification while attempting to resettle displaced persons in areas where peace had been restored.

30. His delegation welcomed the progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 52/198, in particular the signing of a headquarters agreement with the German Government, the cooperation instituted with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UNDP and the World Bank and the growing number of States parties. It urged all States which had not yet done so to adhere to the Convention to Combat Desertification.

31. The second session of the Conference of Parties would provide an opportunity for an exchange of experience and a reaffirmation of commitments and agreement on ways and means to strengthen the Convention. It was the hope of his delegation that as a result of the Conference, States parties would be assured that the institutions formed under the Convention would be made operational.

32. **Mr. Canchola** (Mexico) said that with a view towards the work of the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, his delegation wished to emphasize three points. First, the unity between Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 must be maintained. The latter was not a substitute for the former, but simply a way of putting it into action. Second, Agenda 21 should not be dismantled. At its sixth session the Commission on Sustainable Development had extracted a chapter of Agenda 21, redrafted it and adopted a plan of action. If it continued that way, in five years' time the Commission would simply have adopted a series of new instruments without ever focusing on the real issue: the need for action. Third, efforts should build on previous results and achievements, bearing in mind paragraph 36 of the Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21.

33. At its fourth session the Commission on Sustainable Development had discussed the relationship between the atmosphere and oceans, a topic which had gained relevance in the light of the recent El Niño phenomenon. That discussion should be pursued at the seventh session.

34. The concept of sustainable development carried with it an integral and comprehensive approach touched upon in the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/477). His delegation shared the views expressed on normative coherence among the environmental conventions. In the view

of his delegation, there were two sides to the topic, legal specialization and policy coherence. With regard to legal specialization, the proliferation of regimes with various degrees of commitment for Member States and without common standards for interpretation had contributed to the perceived lack of coherence. However, it could be argued that a legal system showed its maturity by its degree of specialization. Thus, the international community should not be overly concerned by the existence of different regimes in the process of consolidation.

35. From a policy perspective, the problems alluded to in the report of the Secretary-General appeared to stem from the need to maintain a comprehensive, global and integrated approach to environmental topics, the participation of separate areas of the Government in international environmental forums and the temporary nature of negotiating processes. In the view of his delegation, if UNEP took responsibility for promoting policy coherence, there would be a risk of creating supervisory mechanisms that were above the Conferences of Parties of the various conventions and that would undermine their autonomy. Rather, the United Nations system as a whole should assist the implementation of the conventions and promote convergence towards the major objectives of the Rio Conference. His delegation also did not believe that it would be necessary to conduct a legal assessment of the effectiveness of existing instruments, as evaluations of that type would ordinarily be conducted by the Conference of Parties. Finally, care should be taken that the periodic integrated assessments of progress suggested in paragraph 9 (a) of the report should be carried out from a perspective of policy coherence.

36. **Mr. Reshetnyak** (Ukraine) said that the positive results of its sixth session had proved that the Commission on Sustainable Development should continue to play the role of a forum for maintaining the dialogue between Governments and representatives of different groups of civil society, as well as business and scientific circles, workers and non-governmental structures. His delegation considered that greater attention should be given to coordination within the framework of various United Nations conventions. The Economic and Social Council should perhaps devote one of its coordination segments to the issue.

37. His Government fully recognized its responsibility for environmental protection both at the national level and in the global context. It was making tremendous efforts to achieve the goals identified in Agenda 21, but developments in the past decade had shown that even in the prosperous economies it was rather difficult to pursue an efficient policy of sustainable development; the problem seemed to be even more complicated for Ukraine as a newly independent State

experiencing serious economic and social problems, which had worsened recently as a result of the global financial turmoil.

38. The problem of soil degradation had become increasingly acute for many countries, including his own, and it was clear that the processes leading to desertification in different climatic regions were strikingly similar. Within the framework of implementing the Convention to Combat Desertification, more attention should be given to the problems of land degradation and deforestation. Ukraine was interested in adhering to the Convention on the understanding that a special annex would be added, reflecting specific problems relating to desertification and soil degradation in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

39. **Ms. Bachir** (Sudan) said that the forthcoming second session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, to be held in Dakar, would be an important event in the effort to combat desertification and drought. It was to be hoped that it would formulate a medium-term strategy with provision for adequate funding. Countries affected by drought gave priority, in their development programmes, to projects aimed at protecting the environment and combating desertification, and the donor community should backstop their efforts by supporting such projects and programmes in the developing countries, particularly in Africa. Broadly based participation by both international and non-governmental organizations was required for maximum effectiveness.

40. The Sudan itself was affected by the problem of desertification, and sporadically by other climatic problems as well, one of which, paradoxically, had been the severe flooding that had occurred in the spring of the current year. There had been massive damage to the country's infrastructure and housing, and the number of persons affected was in excess of one million. Some 500 villages had been completely destroyed, crops, gardens and fruit trees had been swept away. Her Government was duly grateful for the generous assistance it had received from many quarters and hoped that such assistance would continue to be forthcoming.

41. **Mr. Kaba** (Guinea), said that Guinea was known as "the water tower of West Africa" and its national plan of action for the environment and development included a subregional cooperation component. Its Massif du Mont Nimba had been classified as a world heritage site for its unique fauna and flora, and its subregional project for protecting the fauna of Niokolo-Badiar, which was being implemented in cooperation with Senegal, was moving ahead. The project for the integrated development of the Massif du

Foutah Djallon called for greater involvement by the specialized agencies of the United Nations.

42. However, at least three of Guinea's immediate neighbours were in situations of crisis, and Guinea had received hundreds of thousands of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in the past decade. They now constituted more than 10 per cent of Guinea's population, and their presence had caused increased degradation of its ecosystem, posing a real threat to the environment. Against the background of that looming environmental catastrophe, Guinea had launched an appeal to the international community, which had been positively received. A special meeting had been held at United Nations Headquarters in July 1998 in support of the stability and strengthening of Guinea's programme of sustainable development. Guinea was most grateful for that initiative on the part of the United Nations to provide assistance in dealing with the impact of such a massive refugee presence.

43. **Mr. Llanos** (Chile) said that his Government attached great importance to combating the sources of climate change. One of the most important steps it had taken to put that commitment into practice had been the signing of the Kyoto Protocol. His Government believed that it was appropriate to use market mechanisms to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which at the same time would provide financial resources and promote transfer of clean technology. The Government had undertaken a series of projects to monitor and mitigate the greenhouse effect by compiling an inventory of greenhouse gases, evaluating options for mitigation and assessing vulnerability to climate change. It was also conducting studies on energy efficiency and methanol production from forest biomass.

44. With regard to the Convention on Biodiversity, the National Environment Commission had prepared a comprehensive national biodiversity strategy and had established a system of protected areas. As 45 per cent of the land in Chile was affected by desertification to some degree, the Convention to Combat Desertification was of major importance. His Government had acceded to the Convention in 1997 and had prepared a national plan to confront that problem. It planned to participate in the forthcoming international meeting to be organized jointly by the secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) on the relationship between the El Niño phenomenon and drought and desertification.

45. **Mr. Al-Aujali** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the international community was sorely in need of a strengthened role for the United Nations, and to that end all countries must

unite their efforts to provide material, moral and political support, with no underlying intent to secure political hegemony or economic domination.

46. In addition to desertification and drought, the developing countries were beset with various economic problems so that most of the financial resources that might otherwise have gone into sustainable development were being drained off to service foreign debt. Moreover, coercive economic policies directed against developing countries by one State in particular, whether applied unilaterally or through the Security Council as a result of pressure and manipulation, were tightening the noose around the necks of the peoples of those countries.

47. Environmental problems were a source of serious concern for many countries, especially those affected by poverty and lack of resources. It was most regrettable that the developed countries had thwarted the developing countries' efforts to have the burial of nuclear waste and radioactive materials in shallow sea areas and in other countries' territory included among the crimes listed in the draft Convention on the suppression of acts of nuclear terrorism during the Sixth Committee's working group consideration of the matter.

48. The recent Libyan-Italian joint declaration on the elimination of the traces of Italian colonialism in Libya was a welcome indication of a new era of friendly and constructive relations between the two countries. Land mine clearance and the treatment and rehabilitation of victims of land mines were a prominent feature of that declaration, which was imbued with a spirit of optimism and mutual understanding. Other countries should follow their example.

49. Undaunted by scanty water resources, limited agricultural land and coercive economic measures, Libya was proceeding with the Great Man-Made River Project, which was designed to conquer the desert and provide the Libyan people with drinking water and water for irrigation. Libya's area of usable agricultural land would be substantially expanded as a result, and future generations would enjoy a life of dignity.

50. Libya supported the principles and concepts of environmentalism and sustainable development; sustainable development issues and the effort to combat desertification were high on its list of priorities. It would also participate in the forthcoming Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The countries affected by desertification and drought, especially the African countries, needed much technical assistance.

51. In that connection, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was doing very positive

work through its small-scale projects aimed at helping poor people in rural areas and small peasants. Libya contributed substantially to IFAD and believed that given adequate cooperation between IFAD and other international and regional organizations, the problem of desertification and drought could be overcome.

52. **Mr. Sandi** (Niger) said that Niger, as a Sahelian country two thirds of whose territory was desert, was well aware that its survival depended in the last resort on its unrelenting struggle against the advancing desert. It had drawn up a national plan for the environment and sustainable development, which was its key policy instrument in the environment field, and it was also drawing up a national strategy and plan of action on biological diversity.

53. Niger attached great importance to implementation by the international community of the Convention to Combat Desertification; it appealed to all those countries which had not yet ratified the Convention to do so, and to the international community to mobilize substantially increased resources to combat desertification. Combating desertification required political will, the mobilization of populations, time and perseverance. Above all, it required financial resources.

54. The Government had recently established a technical commission for combating desertification and managing natural resources, and had given it the task of drawing up a national plan to combat desertification as the main component of the national plan for the environment and sustainable development.

55. **Mr. Zubiri** (Philippines) expressed the hope that the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties would advance implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, and the other agreements in the Framework Convention on Climate Change. In accordance with the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities, it was reasonable to expect that the developing countries would not be undertaking commitments similar to those of the Annex I countries, yet serious action must be taken to promote environmental protection, and the developing countries were doing their best despite financial and other related constraints.

56. He outlined the legislation which had been passed and was being prepared by the Philippines Congress, including strengthened environmental impact assessment, regulations for economic activities impinging on the quality of natural resources, an integrated waste management programme and the establishment of an environment adjudication commission with jurisdiction to decide cases involving violations of environmental legislation. He said that the Philippines hoped that the programmes of work adopted at the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological

Diversity would produce immediate results that would be of direct benefit to the developing countries.

57. For developing countries to be able to contribute fully to global efforts for environmental protection and the achievement of sustainable development, the partnership promised at the Rio Conference must become a concrete reality with the transfer of environmentally sound technology, the provision of technical assistance and adequate external resources to support national efforts for the alleviation of poverty and related socio-economic programmes. However, the developing countries were not very optimistic: the international community did not yet have a working plan for transferring environmentally sound technology to them, and technical cooperation assistance through United Nations operational activities had not been given adequate and predictable resources. While the Nordic countries and the Netherlands were to be commended for exceeding the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP, Official Development Assistance from all other donors had declined during the past five years. Despite the current financial crisis in the Far East region, the Philippines continued to forge ahead with its efforts aimed at sustainable development. It was extremely difficult and, as in many developing countries, it was facing a situation where it would have to choose between either protecting natural resources and the environment or feeding its people. That was not a choice that any country should have to make, and it saddened him that some developing countries had already had to do so.

Other matters

58. **Ms. Fahmy** (Egypt) said she wished to point out, for the record, that earlier in the meeting, she had been unable to continue delivering her statement because the interpreter in the English booth had been unable to interpret correctly, precisely and with the proper speed the French interpretation being received from the Arabic booth. She wished to make an official request through the Chair for the Secretariat to investigate the matter and to suggest that consideration be given to the possibility of providing more training for interpreters in the English booth in interpreting from French.

59. **Mr. Zarie Zare** (Islamic Republic of Iran) pointed out that, at the previous meeting, a fictitious and hence invalid term had been used for the body of water which had always been known by the historically and internationally recognized name of the Persian Gulf.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.