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STATEMENT OF SECRETARY-GENERAL AT HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The following is the text of the statement made by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today at the high-level meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development:

Welcome to New York. I congratulate Dr. Klaus Topfer, Minister of Environment of the Federal Republic of Germany, on his election as Chairman of this Commission. The presence here of Ministers and officials from many States proves that the spirit of Rio is still alive.

It is now two years since the Earth Summit was held in Rio. That opened a new era in international cooperation. It broke new ground :

-- It brought together representatives of Member States, intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations. Statesmen, officials, experts, churches and grass-roots groups -- including organizations of indigenous peoples and women's groups -- played an active role.

-- The outcome was a precise and detailed plan to chart the way ahead. Agenda 21 is unprecedented. It is remarkably comprehensive. It is the most detailed blueprint ever accepted by Member States.

-- Perhaps most importantly, the Rio Conference brought a permanent change in the way States view the issue of environment. The concepts of environment and development are now inseparable.

These are pioneering steps. Since Rio, solid progress has been made, both politically and organizationally. Sustainable development is now squarely on the world political agenda. The concept of sustainable development is widely understood and broadly accepted.

(more)

25 May 1994

Never again can we speak of development without speaking as well of sustainability. The fragility of the planet, the vulnerability of the environment which we all share, is better appreciated. Those are important steps forward. They are the result of the Rio Conference.

Within the United Nations, sustainable development is at the heart of development activity. It is a unifying factor in all our policies. United Nations entities are fully committed to Agenda 21. Arrangements are in place to ensure that progress is coordinated and monitored. But still more careful planning, and inter-agency collaboration is required. For their part, Governments could do more to coordinate their positions in the various governing bodies.

Sustainable development is now recognized as the cornerstone of national development policy. Governments are taking steps to implement the Rio recommendations. Some Governments have set up sustainable development councils or commissions. In some countries, Parliaments have passed or are preparing legislation to give effect to Agenda 21.

But much remains to be done. The efforts to move Agenda 21 forward must not simply continue, they must be stepped up. Extraordinary efforts of political will are now required. We must never lose sight of the fact that what is at stake is the future of the planet. There is no alternative. Future generations must be able to breathe good air, to drink good water and to grow good crops.

Today I want to share with you how I see the task ahead,

The crucial challenge is to maintain political will. We must not falter. We must keep up the momentum of Rio. This Commission must take the lead. You are the guardians of the spirit of Rio. This Commission's overriding aim is to promote policies and practices which enshrine the concept of sustainable development. The Commission must also be a forum for forging alliances -- not simply between North and South, but among all actors. Governments, international institutions and non-governmental organizations all must be involved.

Work at the regional level is vital. It is there that different approaches to issues of environment and development can be taken into account. Regionalism adds up to coordination and coherence.

The Commission must also note where progress is slow or non-existent. You should put pressure on those who fall behind. You should praise those who provide models of good practice. You can urge the actors -- state and non-state -- to turn commitments into reality.

But you have no power to enforce your recommendations. The Commission has no power to legislate. You can only persuade the parties to do what they should do. Your political leadership, will determine, in practice, how effective you are. You will have to think and act boldly.

(more)

25 May 1994

That is, I believe, the mandate from Rio. The spirit of Rio calls for commitment, innovation and imagination.

At the same time, we must not lose sight of the broader context. Sustainable development is one of the many dimensions of development itself.

In my "Agenda for Development", published this week, I have tried to set development in that broader context. The first part of my report presents the theoretical foundations of development. The development process requires vigorous action in the areas of peace, economy, environment, society and democracy.

The second part of my report, recalling the General Assembly's request for recommendations on the role of the United Nations, discusses implementing this vision of development. I note the multiplicity of actors in development -- including the Bretton Woods institutions -- and the processes by which the United Nations can help to link these actors to the different dimensions of development in an integrated approach to human security. This will require building upon the special strengths of the development work of the United Nations; forging a global consensus on development issues; setting internationally agreed standards; and undertaking development operations through a network of field offices spanning the globe.

Further discussion and debate, including the hearings being organized by the President of the General Assembly, should help us to reach clearer views on the definition of development.

As the Commission's work proceeds, further contributions will come from the United Nations process. The series of landmark global conferences being organized by the United Nations in the course of this decade will stake out new territory. They will boost the Rio process, providing new insights and new political consensus.

The World Summit for Social Development will be held in Copenhagen in March 1995. Its work will be an essential complement to Agenda 21. The Social Summit will provide the broader perspective on development and social progress. Because it will bring Heads of Government together to focus on this one topic, the Social Summit should generate important political commitments.

Population issues vitally affect sustainable development. The International Conference on Population and Development, to be held in Cairo in September, will have a considerable impact on the successful implementation of Agenda 21.

The Fourth World Conference on Women will be held next year in Beijing. The empowerment of women, and the elimination of gender bias, will have a dramatic effect on both population programmes, and programmes for sustainable development.

(more)

25 May 1994

Successful completion of the Uruguay Round has created one of the necessary conditions for accelerated and sustained economic growth. Agreement to establish a World Trade Organization includes a commitment to a work programme on trade and environment. That Organization, together with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), can make trade and environment mutually supportive.

Yours is not an easy task. Rio was a major world event. It was reported in every corner of the globe. It raised awareness. From it came the spirit of Rio. Those were fine achievements. But, through Rio, expectations were also raised. Action was demanded. Now the world wants results.

The next stage will require sustained commitment; backed by political will at the highest levels. It will also require new resources. And you know very well that we live in a time of resource constraints. That is why new alliances, new approaches, new mechanisms are needed, to harness all the available resources, financial, human and political.

Only if all partners are accountable -- and only if partnerships can be forged throughout the globe -- can world-wide sustainable development be achieved. New alliances, new partnerships are needed. That was the message of the Brundtland Report. It was the message of Rio. It must be the clear message from this Commission on Sustainable Development.

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