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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 26 July 2000, at 11 a.m.

President: Mr. Mbayu (Vice-President) (Cameroon)

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In the absence of Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia), Mr. Mbayu (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 11.45 a.m.

Economic and environmental questions

- (a) **Sustainable development** (A/54/855-E/2000/44; A/55/78-E/2000/56, A/55/89-E/2000/80 and A/55/99-E/2000/86; E/2000/29, E/2000/33, E/2000/97 and E/2000/104)
- (d) **Cartography** (A/54/747-E/2000/6; E/2000/48 and E/2000/49)
- (f) **Statistics** (E/2000/24)
- (h) **Functioning of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, including its role in coordinating science and technology for development** (A/55/96-E/2000/84)

1. **Mr. Faaland** (Chairman of the Committee for Development Policy), introducing the report on the second session of the Committee for Development Policy from 3 to 7 April 2000 (E/2000/33), said that the Committee's work had focused on the role of information technology in development, suggestions for a new international development strategy and the triennial review of the list of least developed countries.

2. Although it had had only rudimentary drafts of a new international development strategy available for constructive comment during its session, the Committee had strongly supported the initial approach of basing analysis and strategy on the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences during the 1990s and their five-year review-processes. The subsequently issued report of the Secretary-General (A/55/89-E/2000/80) presented an authoritative statement of the sets of commitments and programmes of action agreed upon by the international community and formed an indispensable basis for analysis and formulation of a new strategy. The Committee wished to stress, however, that a strategy for development must go far beyond sectoral and issue-oriented action plans. It must provide clear indications of priorities in terms of time and emphasis and have a convincing thrust in order to mobilize political support. Much analytical work remained to be done to clarify the nature and extent of

trade-offs within and between sectors and to relate resource requirements to availabilities.

3. While fully supporting efforts to develop comprehensive strategies for individual developing countries, the Committee suggested that developed countries should also be asked, individually and collectively, to prepare comprehensive action programmes, including time-bound commitments for trade accommodation, debt relief, aid allocation, technical cooperation and investment support.

4. In its triennial review of the list of least developed countries, the Committee had introduced some methodological improvements, including the construction of an economic vulnerability index (EVI) to replace the previous economic diversification index (EDI) as one of the three criteria, along with per capita income and human resource development, for identifying least developed countries. On the basis of its review, the Committee recommended that Maldives should be graduated from the list and Senegal should be included, subject to its Government's acceptance. The Council was referred to paragraphs 90 to 100 of the Committee's report (E/2000/33) for a discussion of specific countries.

5. The Committee proposed that, prior to the next triennial review, consideration should be given to the treatment of countries with large population size and countries in transition. It also planned to revisit the practice by which different rules and thresholds for inclusion in and graduation from the list of least developed countries were applied, so as to ensure a measure of stability and yet give equal treatment to countries in similar situations.

6. **Mr. Fortin** (Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on proposals for strengthening the coordination of the mechanisms on the Commission on Science and Technology for Development within the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) with the objective of promoting complementarity of activities within the United Nations system (A/55/96-E/2000/84), said that the report had been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 54/201. The Commission, in its discussions at its fourth session in May 1999, had felt that its role as science and technology coordinator could best be enhanced by demonstrating leadership in

the area of science and technology for development, assisting countries in formulating research and development policies in that area and encouraging the participation of United Nations organizations in its various panels.

7. In a forward-looking response to the General Assembly request, the UNCTAD secretariat had, among other things, established electronic linkages with other United Nations bodies system-wide through a knowledge and technology for development network known as KTD net, aimed at improving information-sharing, knowledge diffusion and generation of ideas. The UNCTAD secretariat would need additional budget resources, not only to create and operate the network, but also to allow for more active participation by representatives of the secretariats of United Nations organizations in each other's work, particularly expert meetings, on specific themes related to science and technology.

8. **Mr. Habermann** (Director of the Statistics Division), introducing the reports of the Secretary-General on the Fifteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific (E/2000/48) and on the twentieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (E/2000/49), said that the reports dealt with two important events concerning cartography.

9. The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names was a technical body and a forum for reporting on voluntary efforts at geographical names standardization. Its twentieth session had been attended by 162 participants and observers from 52 countries. The six working groups had addressed the topics of toponymic data files, toponymic terminology, romanization systems, country names, training, and publicity and funding. It had recommended that the Council should support the convening of the Group for two working days (26 August and 6 September 2002) in Berlin in conjunction with the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

10. The United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific was a forum in which government officials, planners, scientists and experts from Asia and the Pacific could address common needs, problems and experiences in the field of cartography and geographic information. The Fifteenth Conference had recommended to the Council

that it should endorse the convening of the Sixteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific for five working days in mid-2003 with a primary focus on the continued and strengthened contribution of cartography and geographic information in support of the implementation of Agenda 21.

11. **Mr. Flanders** (Division for Sustainable Development), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on measures taken in the United Nations system to accelerate progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (A/55/78-E/2000/56), said that the report had been prepared under the leadership of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development in response to General Assembly resolution 54/218 and attempted to focus on matters of strategic importance related to collaboration within the United Nations system in the field of sustainable development and to identify the main challenges and constraints in that area.

12. Three topics had received particular attention from the Inter-Agency Committee at its fourteenth and fifteenth meetings, as reported in chapter II: the draft terms of reference for the Environmental Management Group, agreed upon with the United Nations Environment Programme; the expansion of the task manager approach to avoid multiple inter-agency mechanisms; and preparations for the 10-year review of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, for which the Committee urged a proactive approach and early preparations. The report also dealt with developments in the work of the Subcommittees on Water Resources and on Oceans and Coastal Areas of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and of the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Energy and described the outcomes of the seventh and eighth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

13. The report concluded with a discussion of constraints in implementing sustainable development initiatives. It noted that budgetary constraints remained largely unchanged from the first report. To cite one example, of some 300 projects identified in the pledging conference for small island developing States in February 1999, few had been taken up for actual implementation. However, more could be done to promote cooperation among regional institutions and

more effective inclusion of civil society and the private sector at the field level.

14. **Mr. Kinniburgh** (Director of the Development Policy Analysis Division), introducing document E/2000/80, emphasized that the text was merely a draft that comprised primarily selected goals or actions agreed to by one or more of the global conferences. The text had not always adhered strictly to the agreed language that had been used at the global conferences, as it was hoped that the adoption of the new strategy would incorporate more ambitious goals and actions in some areas.

15. Member States had to decide on the form of any new strategy and how it would relate to the outcomes of the global conferences and the five-year review processes. One option would be to produce a document that consolidated the key outcomes of the conferences and review processes, complementing them where necessary to produce a comprehensive strategy. A second option would be a document that complemented rather than repeated what had been agreed in the conferences, and a third option would be a combination of the first two, focusing on a number of issues with measurable goals. In all cases, attention should be given to the means of implementation.

16. **Mr. Tsui** (Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, a.i.), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon (A/55/99-E/2000/86), said that El Niño was the most likely of all weather and climatic events to lead to extensive and devastating natural events affecting humankind. Its influence traversed the globe and had many diverse effects. El Niño's sibling, La Niña, should also be considered, as it too had the potential to cause widespread devastation.

17. The loss of life and material damage associated with the phenomenon could disrupt the social, economic and environmental order of many countries in many regions. The 1997/98 El Niño occurrence had caused the loss of over 24,000 human lives and displaced more than six million people. Over 110 million had been affected to some degree. Conditions associated with El Niño had created habitats favourable to insect vectors, thus contributing to the spread of infectious diseases. Although the impact of the subsequent La Niña event had not yet been assessed, the dramatic floods in Mozambique and the recent

drought in the Horn of Africa were consistent with previous La Niña effects.

18. Through improved understanding and early warning of El Niño-related events, benefits could be achieved by modifying normal practices in fields such as agriculture, water resource management and community health services. International cooperation was vital to that goal. The Inter-Agency Task Force on El Niño provided a platform for combining efforts to improve understanding, disseminate early warnings, and channel technical assistance and resources to the Member States threatened or affected. Broader and sustained policies of risk reduction should be integrated into national economic and developmental strategies.

19. In that context, an international seminar had been convened in November 1998 in Guayaquil, for a global assessment of the 1997/98 El Niño event. A key output had been a thorough scientific and technical analysis of that event prepared by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), with support from other organizations.

20. International support for the Climate Agenda was needed in connection with mitigating the negative impacts of El Niño-related events and other extremes of climate variability. Organizations and agencies of the United Nations system engaged in the technical and developmental aspects of national growth and social well-being should tailor their programmes to address the immediate and longer-term capacities required.

21. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) included a continuation of the international community's efforts to reduce the impacts of El Niño-related disasters previously carried out within the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, which had ended in December 1999. The ISDR task force had set up three working groups, which brought together United Nations agencies, public and professional interests and regional entities.

22. **Mr. Wibisono** (Indonesia) said that in 2002 the 10-year review conference for Agenda 21 would take place when Member States would have the opportunity to mobilize the necessary political commitment to ensure implementation of their common objectives, which had thus far fallen short of expectations. The challenge of regaining the momentum generated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and

Development was formidable and would depend largely on diligent preparations. He welcomed the high quality of the preparations already under way and encouraged the Council to endorse the recommendations made by the Commission on Sustainable Development during its eighth session.

23. His Government was aware of the critical need for balance and sustainability and respected the indivisibility of environmental protection and the development process. It had launched its own national Agenda 21 in March 1997 with the main focus on social and economic dimensions, conservation and the management of resources for development and on the strengthening of the role of the major groups and the means of implementation. It had consistently supported international efforts to fully implement Agenda 21 as well as the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. As full implementation had not materialized, the global environment continued to deteriorate. The occasion of the 10-year review conference should be a turning point in seeking a renewed political commitment and support for sustainable development and the full implementation of Agenda 21 through positive partnerships.

24. His Government was offering to host the review conference, mindful that the three previous international conferences on the environment had taken place in other regions. Also, the Commission on Sustainable Development had emphasized at its eighth session that the 10-year review summit in 2002 should be held in a developing country. In that context, he noted the importance of the question of ownership of the environmental and development programmes and processes by all countries and regions. That was particularly true for the Asia and Pacific Region as it represented more than half of the world's population. While its resources of fauna and flora were vast, they were fragile and vulnerable to the threat posed by unsustainable patterns of development and management.

25. **Mr. Thomas** (United States of America) said that his Government strongly supported Agenda 21 and the 10-year review of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. However, in the light of more general national policy, his delegation had concerns regarding the convening of a world conference, particularly in a location other than New York.

26. **Mr. Shihab** (Observer for Maldives) drew attention to documents E/2000/97 and E/2000/104 containing his Government's observations on the recommendation of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) to graduate his country from the list of least developed countries. He welcomed the use of country-specific vulnerability profiles as a basis for qualitative assessment of the development status of least developed countries to cross-check results derived from quantitative indicators. However, the profiles needed to be further refined to reflect infrastructure construction costs, in-depth analyses of changes and a focus on the most important vulnerability and structural constraints.

27. In view of the critical immediate and long-term challenges facing Maldives, including extensive coastal erosion and coral bleaching, the Committee's call to the Council for special assistance to his country should be seriously examined in order to identify specific follow-up measures and mechanisms. Indeed, the persistence of coral bleaching would devastate the tourism industry, the country's major source of foreign exchange, would cause the fishing industry to collapse, and would eventually lead to coastal erosion. Indeed, his Government had already been forced to relocate entire island populations.

28. After listing a number of constraints that the summary profiles had failed to highlight, he said that CDP must remain faithful to the original rationale for identifying least developed countries. The criteria used by the Committee aimed at identifying performance in certain arbitrarily chosen areas, rather than identifying the extent and impact of long-term structural handicaps and problems of sustainability. The credibility of the triennial review of the list of least developed countries would be lost, if all it served to do was punish the countries that performed well and reward those that did not, irrespective of the existence or absence of debilitating structural handicaps.

29. The process of graduation should not become a de facto imposition of debilitating economic sanctions following the loss of access to markets and to concessional loans and grants. In that regard, he endorsed the repeated calls by the Committee for the compilation of a report on the benefits accruing to a Member State upon being designated a least developed country. In the absence of such a report, he failed to see how the principle established by General Assembly resolution 46/206, paragraph 4, could be upheld.

30. In the light of the foregoing, the Council should defer the graduation of Maldives until the case had been fully examined by the next triennial review of the list of least developed countries, together with the costs of graduation. Anything less would be arbitrary, impractical and unjust.

31. **Mr. Dutriaux** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, said that the Secretariat should explain why there had been substantial delays in translating the report of CDP on its second session.

32. The replacement of the economic diversification index by the economic vulnerability index constituted definite progress, as it involved direct consideration of the vulnerability of countries. As for the debate on the inclusion of an explicit reference to environmental vulnerability, it seemed that discussions would have to continue before a satisfactory methodology could be developed and a sufficient number of reliable data could become available. It was clear, however, that the new criteria proposed by CDP would have to be further refined.

33. As far as the list of least developed countries was concerned, the European Union noted the two changes proposed by the Committee, namely the admission of Senegal and the graduation of Maldives. While the European Union could not comment on the Committee's conclusions, it sympathized with the serious problems that Maldives had to face.

34. The European Union agreed with the topics for consideration suggested by CDP for its future sessions, namely, review of the criterion of population size, the possibility of including countries with economies in transition and the issue of justification for applying more restrictive criteria for inclusion in the list of least developed countries.

35. The European Union shared the Secretariat's concern for consolidating the objectives of the major United Nations conferences and summits of the 1990s in the draft international development strategy for the first decade of the new millennium. Such an exercise would undoubtedly enhance follow-up to the major conferences and make it easier to understand the results achieved. States Members of the United Nations, as well as various multilateral institutions involved in the implementation of the programmes of action of the

major conferences, including international financial institutions, should participate actively in the preparation of the document.

36. In the European Union's view, there was a need to strengthen and further elaborate on the section dealing with human rights and good governance. Good governance was an indispensable prerequisite for the rational and effective use of resources earmarked for development. Moreover, respect for human rights contributed considerably to the implementation of equitable development for all sections of the population, including the most vulnerable.

37. Since it was quite clear that it would not be possible to adopt the international development strategy for the first decade of the new millennium before the end of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, the European Union was open to any suggestions by the Chairman of the Second Committee regarding procedures for future discussions. However, such procedures should be as simple as possible in order to avoid lengthy discussions with respect to the adoption of the strategy. Moreover, care should be taken to avoid any clashes between that procedure and ongoing preparations for major conferences, including the third conference on least developed countries and the high-level intergovernmental event on financing for development.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.