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Chairman: Mr. Suazo (Honduras)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 87: Environment and sustainable development (*continued*)

(b) International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
(A/57/189 and A/57/190)

(d) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa
(A/57/177)

(e) Convention on Biological Diversity (A/57/220)

(f) Further implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/57/131 and A/57/444)

1. **Mr. Naidu** (Fiji), speaking on behalf of the member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum Group that were also Members of the United Nations, said that the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Doha, the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg had served as a forum for guiding the international community in its efforts towards achieving a more sustainable and equitable world. The paths proposed at those meetings must be merged into a coherent road map, because they had become intrinsically interrelated components in the quest for balance between economic development, social development and environmental protection.

2. The current and future well-being of the small Pacific States was dependent on the resources of the Pacific Ocean and on the stewardship of its biological diversity. That was why those countries shared a common responsibility for safeguarding their environment through sustainable development. To the countries of the region, sustainable development was a process which ensured that quality of life and quality of growth were achieved through good governance within limits acceptable to the island communities and without compromising the opportunities available to future generations.

3. Key issues for the Group under agenda item 87 had been covered in the Phnom Penh Regional Platform on Sustainable Development for Asia and the Pacific. Such issues included oceans, climate change, sustainable energy, conservation and management of natural resources, good governance, capacity-building, freshwater and financial resources.

4. The Pacific Islands Forum had incorporated those themes into specific priority plans of action for sustainable development in the region that it had submitted to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Leaders of States in the region had also adopted a comprehensive Pacific Islands regional ocean policy that formed the basis for all ocean governance issues in the region. He hoped that new partners would participate in those initiatives.

5. Following the Johannesburg Summit, an inter-agency task force comprising regional experts from the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific had been created to translate the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation into an appropriate regional strategy, the primary objective of which would be to strengthen national capacities in key sustainable development programme areas and strengthen the focus of interventions in order to promote long-term development.

6. In that regard, the Group strongly reiterated its commitment to Agenda 21, of which the Barbados Programme of Action was a concrete expression; together with the Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Programme of Action embodied a number of principles and actions that the international community had adopted to advance the sustainable development of the small island developing States.

7. The Group had been pleased with the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, particularly the commitments with respect to oceans and small island developing States and the call for an international meeting in 2004 to comprehensively review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. However, many fundamental issues might remain unresolved if the commitments made at the Summit were not honoured. The lack of opportunities due to the isolation and vulnerability of Pacific island countries continued to be an intractable problem, while environmental problems had intensified.

8. Overcoming the vulnerability of Pacific islands to the potential effects of natural disasters, environmental damage and global economic shocks was fundamental to the sustainable development of the region. Recommendations had been made at the recent conferences to address the social, economic and environmental challenges facing the developing world; it was time to merge them into a coherent global strategy and to deliver on the promises made.

9. **Mr. Ahmad** (Iraq) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He recalled that the Johannesburg Summit had given rise to a Political Declaration which represented a concrete effort towards achieving sustainable development; much remained to be done, however, to implement the commitments made, particularly in the area of the environment.

10. For over 10 years, in flagrant violation of human rights and Security Council resolutions, his country had been the target of daily attacks by the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Those two States had used 800 tons of depleted uranium during the 1991 Gulf war, with horrifying consequences for the environment and human health. Aside from the thousands of victims, radioactive dust had polluted the air, water and soil. Following the use of those weapons, there had been a sharp increase in the number of cases of cancer, especially leukaemia, and of miscarriages, particularly in southern Iraq. More than 50,000 children had died and soldiers from the United States of America and elsewhere had been affected by the so-called Gulf war syndrome. At the same time, in the sanctions committee, the United States and United Kingdom representatives were blocking deliveries of drugs which would make it possible to treat those diseases.

11. His delegation had submitted a draft resolution on the effects of the use of depleted uranium in armaments to the First Committee (A/C.1/57/L.14) and hoped that all members would support it.

12. His Government fully supported the efforts of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and to promote international cooperation in order to meet the challenges facing the environment. The international community must work together and take responsibility for putting an end to the practices of certain hegemonic countries which showed disdain for

international commitments, in particular those entered into at Rio. It was also necessary to implement the binding commitments entered into by the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, particularly those concerning greenhouse gas emissions, in accordance with Annex B to the Kyoto Protocol, and to implement a clean development mechanism.

13. **Mr. Kaviratne** (Sri Lanka) associated himself with the statement made by Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He expressed concern that natural and technological disasters were occurring more and more frequently worldwide and posing a growing threat to the world's population. In that context, he welcomed the recommendations made in the Johannesburg Political Declaration regarding the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

14. His country had extremely diverse ecosystems and rich fauna; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had classified some of its regions as World Heritage Sites. For that reason, his Government took conservation very seriously; numerous programmes had been implemented in that area and efforts were also being made to educate schoolchildren about the environment.

15. His Government had signed and ratified a number of international environmental agreements, such as the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.

16. Within the framework of the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification, his Government was currently formulating a national action programme to combat land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought. The national land use policy had been drawn up in collaboration with all stakeholders and a national water policy was also being prepared.

17. Within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, a legal task force had been set up to prepare a draft law on the Convention's recommendations with a view to regulating access to genetic resources and ensuring the equitable sharing of their benefits and on the foreign transfer of biotic

material, in order to prevent illegal activities in that regard. A national biodiversity database was also being established, and his Government had signed the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in 2000.

18. As far as Agenda 21 was concerned, his Government had conducted a comprehensive review of its 40 chapters and had, in collaboration with civil society, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academics and policy makers, formulated recommendations on each of them for the following 10 years.

19. A national framework policy on the clean development mechanism had also been drawn up; it took into account the need to establish poverty alleviation and job creation plans, which were essential if sustainable development was to be achieved.

20. His delegation took the view that the Global Environment Facility should provide financial assistance to developing countries to enable them to strengthen their focal points with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change through the creation of a climate change secretariat. International cooperation was fundamental to the achievement of global objectives; in that connection, the international community should pay urgent and greater attention to the needs of developing countries. Those countries should be able to voice their concerns in such areas as technology transfer and financial resources, which would enable them to fulfil their obligations.

21. **Ms. Held** (Suriname) said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, by Belize on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States and by Barbados on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

22. Her country had a strong tradition of nature conservation, protection of biological diversity and preservation of primary tropical forest, as evidenced by a nature conservation system comprising 17 protected areas, one of which featured on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

23. Six years of civil unrest in her country had caused an erosion of traditional cultural structures and undermined law and order; illegal gold miners had damaged the tropical rainforest ecosystems. The authorities were concerned at the environmental, social and health consequences for indigenous communities

living near the mines. Plans had been developed at the regional level and with the assistance of international organizations to clean up and restore the abandoned gold fields and to develop and regulate sustainable small-scale mining practices.

24. Her Government had recognized that the country's prosperity was largely dependent on the protection of its natural resources. Legislation had thus been adopted to ensure the sustainable exploitation of renewable and non-renewable resources, and a land-use planning programme was being developed with the assistance of international organizations. The forestry sector would promote the sustainable use of forests in order to contribute to the country's socio-economic development and to conservation of the world's tropical rainforests. Agro-forestry projects were aimed at raising the awareness of indigenous peoples in order to broaden their knowledge of composting and natural fertilizers, so that they could improve their agricultural production and avoid heavy shifting cultivation. An eco-tourism action plan had also been developed with significant assistance from the European Union.

25. In a world where freshwater was becoming a scarce commodity, countries like Suriname, which possessed significant water reserves, should develop plans for sustainable water management. Indeed, her country had adopted legislation to maintain its reserves. In that connection, her Government welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative to place water on the list of priority issues for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

26. Within the context of economic and technical development, her Government would continue to pay special attention to environmental protection. To that end, it had ratified the majority of relevant conventions and was preparing to ratify the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Convention to Combat Desertification. The Suriname Government associated itself with States Members of the United Nations which had recognized that sustainable development could not be attained unless the necessary attention was paid to the environment.

27. Practical steps must be taken to honour commitments made under the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and Johannesburg Declaration, and to keep the promises made at major United Nations conferences, from Doha to Johannesburg.

28. **Mr. Gospodinov** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), recalling that Agenda 21 had been discussed at the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development, said that his delegation had worked hard to demonstrate the intimate link between natural disasters and sustainable development. Unsustainable or unfocused development had a direct impact on the frequency and intensity of disasters, which in turn impeded sustainable development. The keys to effectively reconciling development and natural disaster management lay in risk reduction, preparedness, community empowerment and building partnerships.

29. The Federation contributed to risk-reduction activities at the local level and advocated the inclusion of risk reduction in development strategies, programmes and plans formulated at the governmental and international levels. It would continue to work with Governments and with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to establish preparedness mechanisms.

30. In the area of risk-reduction activities, he paid tribute to the Nepalese Red Cross Society, whose disaster-preparedness programme consisted largely of establishing a network of district trainers and trained volunteers to help communities design their own plans. Another example was Cambodia: without being in a position to eliminate the root causes of the country's vulnerability to disasters, which were linked to economic, social and political factors, the Cambodian Red Cross sought to mitigate the impact of disasters and thereby prevent families from falling deeper into poverty and losing their meagre gains. A similar type of initiative linking risk reduction to development had been successfully undertaken by the Vietnamese Red Cross Society, in particular through its mangrove programme.

31. Those three examples showed that it was not possible for any one agency to overcome the vast and complex challenges confronting the most vulnerable countries on its own, and that the delivery of effective assistance required partnership. Accordingly, the Federation hoped to involve as many partners as possible in risk reduction, and signed an agreement with the Ericsson company to that end; it had also recently signed a memorandum of understanding with UNEP.

32. The Federation's approach to the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction was to focus on individuals and communities, helping them to understand the hazards they faced and the capacities they had or needed to acquire in order to reduce risk and enhance their ability to overcome adverse events. That work could be done effectively only by the institutions of the country itself, which was why the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were an important component in disaster preparedness and response programmes. The Federation worked closely with its national member societies, investing in the recruitment and training of volunteers and in the support structures which they required in order to respond effectively.

33. The Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development contained a substantial section on the specific problems faced by small island developing States: it emphasized the role of local communities, the need for comprehensive risk management, disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness, the dangers associated with climate change, the promotion of equitable access to health care, and the need to combat HIV/AIDS.

34. The Federation had noted with interest the possibility of convening in 2004 an international meeting on the sustainable development of small island States in order to review implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action; it would be ready to contribute as much as possible to the debate. A preliminary discussion of those issues would take place in November 2002 when the Asia-Pacific national societies held a conference in Manila.

35. The Federation would participate in other debates during the current session of the General Assembly and hoped that Governments, like their National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, would be willing to meet the challenges identified in Johannesburg.

36. **Mr. Donocik** (United Nations Industrial Development Organization) said that the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) had participated in the World Summit on Sustainable Development process and welcomed the agreement reached on the special provisions contained in Chapter VII of the Plan of Implementation adopted at the Summit. With respect to energy for sustainable development, one of the areas highlighted in that chapter, the communiqué of the Fourth Summit of the

Heads of State and Government of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) stated that the participants were resolved to establish partnerships to ensure that adequate, affordable and environmentally safe energy sources were available in order to promote the sustainable development of small island developing States, renewable energy and energy efficiency.

37. UNIDO was pleased that the Initiative on Rural Energy for Productive Use which it had proposed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development had been accepted as a partner initiative for two European Union projects on energy. One chapter of the Initiative was devoted to the energy situation of small island developing States.

38. At the Johannesburg Summit, UNIDO had also concluded a letter of agreement with the E-7, the organization of the largest utilities of the G-7 countries, in order to identify possibilities for technical cooperation with developing countries. In cooperation with the Climate Institute, UNIDO was currently developing a programme proposal for the Caribbean islands of Saint Lucia, Dominica and Grenada; in a second phase, it would consider possibilities for cooperation in the Pacific region. UNIDO looked forward to discussing those specific proposals with interested partners and, more directly, with AOSIS and the countries concerned.

39. **Ms. Weill-Hallé** (International Fund for Agricultural Development) said that 75 per cent of the extreme poor lived in rural areas and that water, land and other natural resources played a central role in their livelihood strategies. Thus, desertification was more than a threat to poverty alleviation; it was also a significant obstacle to achieving the millennium development goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015. Accordingly, sustainable land management and rural poverty reduction must move forward hand in hand; protecting vulnerable lands required empowering the rural poor to break the vicious cycle of poverty and land degradation. To do so, access by the poor to land, water, financing, technology, efficient markets and supportive institutions must be improved.

40. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was doing much to ensure that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification fulfilled its potential to generate concrete results. In addition to financing projects and programmes, it also supported implementation of the

Convention as the agency housing the latter's Global Mechanism. Opportunities for IFAD to build on that support were reinforced by the historic decision of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to open a new focal area on land degradation; both GEF and the Global Mechanism had a complementary relationship to the Convention. Since GEF, as a financing mechanism, could cover only the incremental costs of investment projects, the Global Mechanism played a vital role in mobilizing the additional resources required for implementation of the Convention. The Mechanism also played a key role in helping affected States parties to translate national, subregional and regional action plans into investment opportunities. The Mechanism also promoted mainstreaming of the Convention's principles into the overall development strategies of affected countries and into the work of development institutions.

41. As the executing agency designated by GEF with a special role in the focal area for land degradation, IFAD welcomed those new opportunities for partnership. New alliances could now be forged to break the vicious cycle of land degradation and rural poverty.

42. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had concluded its general debate on agenda item 87 (b), (d), (e) and (f).

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.