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84th plenary meeting

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Official Records

President: Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 53 (continued)

Sustainable development

Special meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of International Mother Earth Day

Mr. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): One year ago yesterday, the United Nations adopted by consensus resolution 63/278 designating 22 April as International Mother Earth Day. On that day, we affirmed the common interest of humanity in the protection of our planet and environment. On that day, Bolivian President Evo Morales Ayma, for whose leadership on this issue we are extremely grateful, said that 60 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Mother Earth is now, finally, having her rights recognized (see A/63/PV.80).

Today, it is critical that we, the human inhabitants of this planet, view this year's political developments related to climate change through the prism of our consensus acknowledgment that the Earth and its ecosystems are our home and the necessity of achieving a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations.

Through that prism, our recent history as caretakers of the planet can only be viewed as profoundly disappointing. In December 2009, we gathered in Copenhagen with the collective goal of reaching a legally binding agreement to combat the grave and gathering threat of climate change.

However, we failed to deliver at Copenhagen, and the road to that failure was paved by our collective good intentions. The well-intentioned last-ditch efforts to salvage the Copenhagen process produced a document that, unfortunately, is both procedurally and substantively flawed. Already, it is apparent that the voluntary mitigation commitments arising from the Copenhagen Accord will far exceed even the most liberal estimates as to what constitutes acceptable temperature rise. Mother Earth deserves far better.

Instead of seeking the balance to which resolution 63/278, on Mother Earth, refers, we are in danger of devolving into an unseemly trade of degrees for dollars, where rich emitters attempt to pledge money instead of pledging change in the face of climate change, and where cash-strapped developing countries pragmatically weigh the relative short-term benefits of a suicide pact that threatens their very existence.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is a small island developing State (SIDS) that has contributed minimally but is affected mightily by the fallout attributable to climate change. Our economic and physical survival is at risk as a result. As stated in the Port Vila outcome statement of the recently concluded five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy, held in Vanuatu,

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“The adverse impact of climate change threatens to offset development gains for a number of SIDS and in several cases their actual physical existence and survival. SIDS are on the frontline of climate change and many have diverted scarce resources meant for socio-economic development to adaptation and mitigation programmes”.

There is no profit margin, no political expediency and no procedural roadblock that can justify the abuse that we continue to inflict on Mother Nature. This planet is the only one we have. We are part of Mother Earth, and we are merely caretakers for generations that will enjoy and rely upon her in the future. It is our solemn obligation to protect and restore this planet for those who come after us.

In this, the International Year of Biodiversity, we must be mindful of the fact that our obligations extend even beyond the human race and touch and concern the abundant flora and fauna in which are but a tiny constituency.

In conclusion, I return to a statement made by our delegation two years ago, after the adoption of the Bali Road Map. Our delegation stated:

“While Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is fully cognizant of the critical importance of steady and efficient procedural progress in coordinating the global effort against climate change, we in the United Nations cannot become so enamoured with the process that we lose sight of the substance of our mission. There is an old joke in the medical profession whose punchline is: ‘The operation was a success, but the patient nonetheless died.’” (A/62/PV.82, p. 25)

We cannot afford the same when the patient is Mother Earth.

Mr. Montejo (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): I convey to all participants the greetings of my country, Guatemala, its Government and all the peoples that make it up. May your presence in this Conference Room bring you success and joy. On behalf of the heart of the heavens and the heart of the Earth, I wish manifold blessings for each and every one.

Yesterday — 5 Kame in the Mayan calendar — was a day that meant contact with the dead and with what is good. We are all born and will one day return to our place of origin; for the Mayan world, death is a beneficent energy — contact with our ancestors.

Representatives of all the world’s peoples anxiously hope that their proposals on the various items on the Assembly’s agenda will be taken into account and that their voices will be heard by the leaders and Governments of all States Members of the United Nations.

Among the themes of concern to all the world’s peoples is that of defending and rescuing planet Earth, and we are therefore most appreciative of Bolivia’s proposal, which invites the human family to recall that our species depends on the health of the planet and that it is the Earth that produces everything we consume each day. First and foremost, we know that we humans are part of nature and that nature is part of us. The Earth is the source of life, and if it does not enjoy good health all living beings will be doomed to speedy extinction.

Mayan cosmology has it that, as a part of the whole, human life becomes possible through interaction among four elements: water, air, fire and earth. If one of those elements is missing or has deteriorated, the lives of human beings and of the cosmos will be damaged or will come to an end. The natural law of our existence as members of a people and as human beings is that there must be a respectful and balanced relationship with water, fire, air and earth. That is true also of entire peoples. Our cosmology maintains that every culture has the responsibility to respect, generate and preserve the life of the human species and its balanced relationship with nature and the cosmos.

Complementarity lies in the interrelationship among the homogeneous and the heterogeneous, the similar and the dissimilar, the positive and the negative: elements that together form a single whole. That interrelationship is a precondition for balance and harmony in life. To understand that we are all complementary is to practice the principle of *tz’aqat*: I am you, and you are me; without you I am incomplete; what I do with you affects me. This is an interrelationship of respect, in which it is of fundamental importance to acknowledge one another with our own virtues and flaws and to recognize that we are a part of the network of life and one element of diversity — without which, the unity of the universe would be incomplete.

Building consensus towards greater harmony with nature is part of what we think and feel. Our social and

political action is thus not limited to material things; rather, it should aim at preserving balance in the economic, social, cultural and political lives of our peoples and nations and in their relationship with the cosmos.

The principle of complementarity is linked to respect among and for all beings in nature and the universe. Thus, we must promote and practice complementarity not only with other human beings but also with the elements with which we coexist. Defending the life of Mother Earth benefits not only the few; it benefits the human species with no exceptions or distinctions whatsoever — as well as the fauna, the flora and all else that exists and inhabits Mother Earth.

Climate change and all the natural disasters that have claimed so many human lives in recent months are the agonized cry of Mother Earth — a cry to which we must respond together. For reasons of moral and ethical principle, those who have caused so much damage must be the first to respond to that cry.

I take this opportunity to congratulate all peoples and nations, and the United Nations, for the concrete action they have taken to protect the life of Mother Earth.

Ms. Čolaković (Bosnia and Herzegovina): The delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is very pleased to join all members in celebrating International Mother Earth Day. We would like to thank the Plurinational State of Bolivia for initiating this plenary meeting of the General Assembly. We strongly support resolutions 63/278, “International Mother Earth Day”, and 64/196, “Harmony with Nature”.

We all share the same home — Mother Earth. We cannot survive without its ecosystems, abundance and diversity. For centuries, Pachamama, as it is called in the Andean region, has provided for humankind and now, more than ever, there is a need to give back and pay our respects. We simply cannot afford to take from nature’s resources and never give anything in return.

It is evident that environmental degradation, the exploitation of the planet’s natural resources and constant climate change are putting planet Earth in greater danger every day. She is trying to tell us something through tsunamis, volcano eruptions, extreme droughts, iceberg melting, hurricanes and floods. Many scientists and biologists now argue that

we may be standing at the edge of a cliff and that much damage to the environment may be irreversible. We owe it to ourselves and to future generations to ensure that living conditions on planet Earth do not further deteriorate and that new generations have the same chance to live on an ecologically healthy and sustainable planet.

Environmental sustainability is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals that are set to be achieved by 2015. Climate change needs constant monitoring and requires immediate response by the international community. As the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina stated last year during the general debate of the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session,

“[n]either economic nor political interests must be allowed to obstruct the achievement of a global consensus as the true beginning of a global struggle to prevent the loss of the natural balance of our planet”. (A/64/PV.5, p. 7)

As the world’s population grows, so too does our footprint. It is of crucial importance to find a way to live and grow in harmony with nature. Nature has finite resources, and we need to ensure that we live within those limits. The great challenge we face today is to learn how to fit in with our biosphere and how to be a sustainable member of the community. In our everyday activities, we have moved away from living in harmony with nature. We need to stay mindful that there is a close interdependence between nature and a healthy and productive life. In order to achieve the optimal symbiosis between the Earth’s ecosystems and social and economic development, we need to create a healthy, sustainable and harmonious relationship with nature. The more we nourish and nurture Mother Earth, the more we will be able to get from her. Moreover, we need to observe Earth Day every day.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): I would like to start by conveying the deep appreciation of my delegation to President Treki and the delegation of Bolivia for having organized this important meeting.

Today, I am honoured to announce that the President of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Nasheed, has received the Champions of the Earth award, the United Nations most prestigious environmental prize, at a ceremony held by the United Nations Environment Programme in Seoul, Republic of Korea, to mark International Mother Earth Day. The

President was awarded the prize in the category of policy and leadership. He accepted the award on behalf of the whole Maldives and said he was “humbled by this recognition” and that it was his “duty to continue working” in this regard. He is indeed very right; it is the duty of all of us to continue working on the important issue of global climate change, the greatest challenge the world has ever known. Today, we are left to make decisions that could impact Mother Earth for centuries to come.

All human beings living on Mother Earth — including those living in the island nations and the most vulnerable countries on the planet — have equal rights to food, water and shelter and to live in dignity in their own nations. Today, we call upon all nations to take actions consistent with moral and ethical values at a time when our planet is already showing signs of great strain.

Those who are suffering the consequences of climate change are not those who reaped the benefits of economic gain by damaging the environment. As our President pointed out in Seoul today, the oil companies earn millions of dollars a minute, producing products that are destroying our planet, and those that are paying for this pollution are the people of Maldives and others living in the most vulnerable parts of the world. It is the survival of these very countries that is in doubt. That is the real cost of climate change.

Our concern today should be to tackle global warming with urgency before it is too late. We do not believe that island nations like Maldives are out of hope yet; we do not believe it is too late for us. But we also believe that, if we are to survive, we must fix the socio-economic and political system that created this chaos.

A global effort is required in a global economy where the price of carbon is global, too. Such an effort must pave the way for clean technologies and renewable sources of energy, and open doors for new global companies. That global effort can lead to a green revolution that will reshape geopolitics. Each and every country, regardless of the size of its carbon footprint, has an important role to play in the protection of Mother Earth. Maldives will endeavour to do its part to realize our common goal of achieving environmental sustainability.

It is true that two decades of global action have not yielded the results we had hoped for, yet we refuse

to give up hope. We believe that a true partnership with a common and shared vision of commitment and multilateral solidarity can still guarantee our future. There are indeed the means and the resources; what is lacking is the political will.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to add its full support to the call made by the Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) for containing the average global temperature increase to below 1.5 degrees Celsius, a position. That position, as stated by the Ambassador of Grenada, is supported by AOSIS and a total of 103 United Nations Member States.

Mr. Berguño (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to thank those delegations that have expressed their solidarity with my country here and in other forums, and to reiterate our condolences to Haiti, Indonesia and China, which have been struck by devastating earthquakes, and to Brazil for the heavy rains and landslides in that country.

In referring to agenda item 53 (d), “Protection of global climate for present and future generations”, I address the General Assembly today on the occasion of the celebration of International Mother Earth Day in the conviction that we must create a world that is more harmonious, mindful and respectful of the need to preserve the sustainability of our planet. As other delegations have pointed out, in the long term this is about respecting the limits set by nature while bearing in mind that, although resilient, human beings are not immune to the ecological and climatic changes under way and that we must modify our patterns of consumption and impose discipline on our growth.

In that regard, we look forward to the ongoing negotiations in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, under which we hope to achieve ambitious goals and the commitments from developed countries necessary to making progress during the post-2012 period.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker for this special meeting.

I now declared concluded the special meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of International Mother Earth Day.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 53.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.