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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 25th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HARLAND (New Zealand)

later: Mr. KAABACHI (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 141: COUNTRIES STRICKEN BY DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT (A/39/242 and Add.1, A/39/530)

1. Ms. DANIELSEN (Norway), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, welcomed the fact that the General Assembly attached special importance to the problem of desertification which, as emphasized by the Governing Council of UNEP, was serious not only for the countries affected but also for the world as a whole. Environmental destruction recognized no national frontiers. Declining productivity, increasing atmospheric dust, the destruction of water systems and the loss of genetic diversity were but a few of the effects of desertification which also had an adverse impact on political and social stability.
2. In economic terms, desertification could be expressed as a loss of \$520 billion in agricultural production over the next 20 years. In human terms, its implications were incalculable - dislocation of the social structure, displaced populations, flows of refugees, in short, famine, sickness and death.
3. Only a firm collective commitment could solve the problem. So far only a few of the affected countries had been in a position to develop effective national plans, but efforts had been made to co-ordinate policies and establish common plans of action at the national and regional levels. The Ministerial Conference for a joint policy to combat desertification in the CILSS, ECOWAS and Maghreb countries and in Egypt and the Sudan, held at Dakar from 18 to 27 July 1984, was evidence thereof.
4. Combating desertification was undoubtedly of prime importance, but not enough: the action taken must be closely tied to development aid programmes and integrated into national conservation and development strategies. In addition to government action, efforts must be made to heighten the awareness of individuals and organizations and to enlist their support.
5. The Nordic countries fully endorsed resolution 12/10 of 28 May 1984 in which the UNEP Governing Council had decided that a further overall assessment of progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification should be carried out in 1992 (para. 28). It was to be hoped that the recommended expansion of the role of the Consultative Group for Desertification Control, (para. 24) and the decision to establish the Desertification Branch as a programme activity centre in order to make it more effective (para. 23) would help to achieve the desired progress. In any event, it was necessary to proceed on the premise that desertification must and could be halted.
6. Mr. MANNIX (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the States members of the European Economic Community, said that the problems of desertification and drought had taken on major dimensions and posed a formidable obstacle to the development of many countries. Desertification was due basically to the overuse and misuse of land. Population growth - for example, the population in the Sahel region had risen from

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(Mr. Mannix, Ireland)

19 million in 1961 to 31 million in 1980 - automatically increased the pressures on land use through greater demand for food-crops, wood and water. In addition, insufficient attention had been paid to improving agricultural productivity and promoting rural development. Forests had been depleted to provide fuelwood, causing further soil erosion. The desert was advancing at a rate of 2 million hectares a year, while forests were receding at a rate of 1 per cent a year. The most recent phase of the prolonged and extensive drought had coincided with a period of exceptional economic difficulty, both in Africa and in the world at large.

7. The response to those problems must come from both the affected countries and the international community. The most appropriate approach to dealing with them would be to make better use of the means available, both nationally and internationally, which had not yet been used in a fully effective manner.

8. In his report (A/39/289), the Secretary-General had commented on the positive response of the international community to the emergency situation in Africa: the total amount of food aid was likely to be close to the 3.3 million tons recommended by FAO, although serious difficulties persisted in distribution. A number of United Nations agencies, in particular UNEP and UNSO, played an important part in assisting the affected countries directly in dealing with desertification problems.

9. The countries members of the European Economic Community continued to support the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, but the assessment of the Plan's implementation plainly showed that the war was not being won, although there were successes in some areas. The European Community and its member States were active in providing general economic support to the States affected, especially in Africa, through aid programmes and special trade provisions; they also assisted in specific steps aimed at controlling desertification. The new Lomé Convention would accord a higher priority to the problems of desertification and deforestation. The Community had adopted a special programme entitled "Fight against hunger in the world", which consisted of two types of action: one was intended to increase the degree of self-sufficiency in food production; and the other to safeguard natural resources. It had identified three priority targets for the future: promotion of reforestation and the efficient use of fuelwood; protection and economic management of livestock and game resources; and efficient water resource management. It was important to concentrate those efforts where they could be most productive, specifically on the major agricultural areas, on river and lake basins and on the areas around major cities. The active support of the local population was essential to their success. Unless vigorous measures were taken, desertification could become irreversible and vast areas could be permanently lost for productive purposes.

10. The Governing Council of UNEP had already pointed to the need for the affected countries to increase their own efforts by giving greater priority to fighting desertification, drawing up national plans of action and engaging in greater regional co-operation. The Dakar Ministerial Conference had also affirmed the need for strategies to that end and had recommended that each participating State should devise a strategy and a national plan for integrating the anti-desertification campaign into economic and social development plans.

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(Mr. Mannix, Ireland)

11. Desertification was caused partly by climate and partly by human action. External assistance was essential and, as the human, financial and technical resources needed far exceeded the capacity of the affected countries to provide them on their own, the policies and measures required could be implemented only by the Governments of those countries. The European Community would continue to provide assistance in overcoming the problems.

12. Mr. KAABACHI (Tunisia) said that he was gratified that item 141 had been included in the agenda on the initiative of Senegal (A/39/242) and observed that the twofold scourge of drought and desertification had become an insurmountable obstacle for the countries affected and was frustrating their development efforts.

13. Tunisia, which suffered from that scourge, had participated all the more actively in the work of the Dakar Conference which had been held because it had become clear that there was a need for vigorous and expanded joint action among the stricken countries and for a firm political commitment on the part of the international community. Passing beyond the diagnostic phase, the participants had put forward recommendations and proposed measures which Tunisia supported (see, inter alia, A/39/530, p. 2).

14. However firm the will of the affected countries to fight the scourge, they could not by themselves tackle the problems confronting them. Sustained and more intensive action by the international community was necessary. Donor countries, international institutions and multilateral financing agencies must contribute their financial and technical support. UNEP, whose co-operation and assistance were deeply appreciated by Tunisia, would have a key role to play in mobilizing and co-ordinating the efforts.

15. For its part, Tunisia, which hoped to be able to count on both bilateral and multilateral assistance, had decided to formulate a national strategy which would encompass projects already identified and others still to be determined: pilot schemes for combating desertification; establishing a national seed bank for reforestation and regenerating rangeland; preparing an agro-ecological map for identifying area suitability and land uses; monitoring and evaluating natural resources in southern Tunisia and development projects for that region which was exposed to desertification; and the training of cadres.

16. Mr. ESSY (Ivory Coast), pointed out that one of the worst droughts ever to strike the African continent, which was threatened with accelerated desertification, had led to a sharp drop in crops, dwindling supplies of drinking water - resulting in the spread of diseases such as bilharzia, Guinea worm and onchocerciasis - decimation of livestock, generalization of brush fires and industrial crisis. Entire villages had been ravaged. Losses in the coffee and cocoa plantations alone ranged between 500,000 and 600,000 hectares. In order to remedy the shortage of hydroelectric power it had been necessary to finance a costly programme for the purchase of gas turbines and related equipment. The policy of food self-sufficiency introduced in 1981 was being threatened and export earnings had fallen significantly. The situation in the Ivory Coast was being called a national disaster; in the Sahelian regions it was a veritable catastrophe.

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(Mr. Essy, Ivory Coast)

17. The two main causes of the climatic disturbances which were causing drought and desertification were the decline in the rainfall and the influence of the harmattan. They appeared to be having a synergetic effect in the coastal areas and the region of the Sahel. The change in the pattern of rainfall of a country such as the Ivory Coast was enlightening in that respect. Statistics showed that rainfall had been declining throughout the country since 1941 and that, in 1983, rainfall had been 30 per cent below normal almost everywhere. A detailed analysis of the period 1960-1983 revealed that the greatest shortfalls had been recorded in areas where deforestation had been most pronounced. Of the 15 million hectares of forest that had existed at the turn of the century only 4 million hectares remained. Every year some 300,000 hectares of dense forest were cleared and used for agriculture - an agriculture that was disorganized and anachronistic. The Ivory Coast was turning into a savannah and that had serious implications not only for the forests but also for the environment and the conservation of the climate. Tropical forests made the atmosphere very humid and their effect could be felt very far away, as far as the thorny Sahelian bush. It was therefore clear that drought in the Sahel might be a direct consequence of excessive deforestation in the coastal countries.

18. That finding led quite naturally to the question of the harmattan, the hot, dry north-easterly wind, which was always competing with the south-westerly monsoon that carried very humid air from the oceans.

19. Because of the complex way in which they retained and diffused water, forests were a major factor in controlling the biological effects of the dry season. Felling trees and clearing vast tracts of forest land meant letting in the harmattan and the fires that followed in its wake.

20. Desertification was a threat not only in Africa. It was a world-wide problem, which called for the adoption of large-scale specific measures. It was not utopian to advocate the establishment of a "Dakar plan" - following the recent Ministerial Conference - which would be an overall programme based on a global perspective with well-defined orientations, that took into account national specificities. The Ivory Coast had drawn up a plan the implementation of which, and follow-up to, called for the creation of a national committee to co-ordinate activities to combat desertification. It could also be integrated within the framework of continuing regional co-operation.

21. Naturally, the establishment of a global mechanism called for considerable resources which countries could not mobilize by themselves. The interdependence between the countries stricken by drought and the developed countries, which had everything to gain from trade with economically viable partners, called for financial assistance unfettered by narrow concepts of immediate profit. Since desertification was a process that fed on itself, the more action was postponed the more difficult it would be to halt the process. He hoped that, at the conclusion of the debate, guidelines for large-scale action could be worked out and that countries would commit themselves clearly to implementing them.

22. Mr. MURIITHI (Kenya) said that the major causes of desertification and drought in Africa were the encroaching desert, which had been advancing at the rate of 125 miles each year; the considerable population increase of the past 20 years; lack of awareness of the consequences of deforestation, overgrazing and other practices; inadequate financial resources and technological know-how; shortage of trained manpower and lack of research capabilities.

23. The issue of desertification and drought had been on the agenda of the United Nations for some time and the importance of environmental programmes had been adequately stressed in the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade. He recalled the adoption, in 1977, of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification and the subsequent resolutions of the General Assembly, in particular resolution 32/172 on the implementation of the Plan of Action. His delegation endorsed the efforts made in that area within the United Nations system, in particular by UNEP. It was aware that countries affected by desertification and drought also received assistance on a bilateral basis; however, assistance had not kept pace with the serious threat posed by the two phenomena to the fragile economies of the affected countries. He hoped that the Second Committee would make action-oriented recommendations to enable the United Nations, other competent institutions and donor countries to assist the affected countries to cope with the situation on a short-, medium- and long-term basis.

24. Since desertification and drought were among the main causes of the critical economic situation in Africa, his delegation hoped that the Second Committee would give impetus to the consideration of that item so that the problems of desertification and drought could be considered in light of the overall crisis in Africa. African Governments, seriously concerned by the effects of the two phenomena on the economies of their countries, had spared no efforts to find solutions individually and collectively, as demonstrated by the Lagos Plan of Action which had been adopted in 1981. For the implementation of that Plan, African States had joined their efforts with those of the Economic Commission for Africa and UNEP. In the Special Memorandum on Africa's Economic and Social Crisis, which had been adopted in Addis Ababa in May 1984, the African ministers responsible for economic development and planning had emphasized the need to gain more knowledge of the causes and mechanics of desertification and drought. Kenya welcomed the report of the round-table meeting on the climatic situation and drought in Africa, which had been endorsed by the ECA Conference of Ministers in May and had been considered by the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session, in July. The regional plan of action on the short-, medium- and long-term measures to be undertaken to combat the adverse impact of drought in Africa would be implemented by African Governments individually and collectively. Action was also being taken at the subregional level. To that end, the Ministerial Conference on Desertification which had been held in Dakar had been a step in the right direction. In East Africa, the six affected countries had agreed to establish an intergovernmental body to combat drought and other natural disasters as required by General Assembly resolution 37/147. The preparatory meeting of competent authorities would be held in Djibouti, in January 1985, to work out modalities for the establishment of that body.

(Mr. Muriithi, Kenya)

25. Kenya, two thirds of which could be classified as arid and semi-arid land, was taking concrete measures to combat drought as were other African countries. Since agriculture, livestock, fauna and flora played a vital role in its economy, the Government had adopted a forestry policy and a master plan for the protection, conservation and development of national resources. It had established a presidential commission for soil conservation and reafforestation and was endeavouring to develop surface and groundwater resources to supplement rain water and to develop irrigation in the plains. His Government was grateful for the assistance it was receiving from external sources. It felt, however, that there was need for increased bilateral and multilateral assistance to the affected countries to improve their financial, scientific and technological and also research capabilities and to establish early warning systems.

26. Mr. HAYFORD (Ghana) said that the need to halt and reverse the ravages of desertification and drought constituted one of the greatest challenges facing the international community. It was therefore appropriate that those issues should receive special attention in deliberations at the General Assembly's thirty-ninth session.

27. Recent national experience had made Ghana painfully aware of the damage that could be done to all aspects of national life by desertification and drought. In the past few years, prolonged drought had led to the loss of a substantial proportion of the nation's food and export crops. Ghana had also begun to experience the effects of the accelerating desertification which was ravaging the Sahel directly to its north. Accordingly, in 1983 it had sought to be included in the mandate of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office and looked forward to close co-operation with it as well as with UNEP. Programmes for early 1985 were already in preparation and it was hoped that they would attract funding from donor countries.

28. The seriousness of the threat posed by desertification to the global environment was all too clear and international support for efforts to combat it should be not only generous but also prompt.

29. Mr. FAURE (France) said that France, convinced that a number of developing countries were indeed "stricken" by the drought, had participated in the Dakar Ministerial Conference with a view to accelerating and spreading awareness of the problem within the international community, comparing the various approaches to the campaign against desertification and drought, and outlining efficient joint action for the future. The elements of the problem were simple. Desertification, which constituted a major threat to the survival of vast areas, was largely the result of social and economic phenomena - excessive pressures exerted on land and its vegetative cover by both human beings and animals - which had to be brought under better control. The French delegation therefore noted with interest that the problem was treated in the ECA Ministers' special memorandum with the importance it deserved. Although the drought was to a large extent uncontrollable, the fundamental problems it had brought to light - that of the need for rational water management and that of the precariousness of the food sector in much of the African continent - were also social and economic in nature.

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(Mr. Faure, France)

30. Serious as they were, the phenomena concerned were not inexorable. France reaffirmed its belief that they had to be combated within a framework of greater North-South solidarity. To call upon new solidarities outside the traditional structure in an effort to promote not only national action but also action by local and regional communities in developed countries, would certainly galvanize North-South interaction.

31. The effort would have to be a long-term one, going far beyond the limits of emergency aid, which was necessary but inadequate. It was becoming increasingly imperative to formulate and implement a realistic plan of action making more effective use of available resources. France had developed its ideas on the subject at Dakar and had also proposed to its partners in the European Economic Community that a chapter on drought and desertification control should be included in the future Lomé III Convention.

32. The objective should be, first, to support action aimed at the conservation, restructuring and sound utilization of the environment. Such action should be taken within an integrated framework and with the voluntary participation of rural populations, since peasants - the real protagonists in the struggle against desertification - were those who must be convinced and helped. In particular, action should be aimed at protecting natural forest stands against over-exploitation and fires and at promoting the regeneration of vegetation. It should also aim at stopping erosion due to wind and water and at establishing, improving, developing and protecting water points, and should then support training and R & D and ensure more intensive monitoring and forecasting of drought and desertification phenomena. Such, in brief, were the activities France had been pursuing for many years under bilateral or regional programmes, such as those of CILSS or the Ouagadougou plan of action, and which it intended to strengthen further. Within the same framework, President Mitterrand had proposed the holding of a congress of top-level political representatives of countries affected by deforestation. The congress was to be sponsored by FAO in July 1985 and was to be devoted to forestry problems. Its purpose would be to determine the most efficient ways of promoting research on particularly productive tree species and teaching local populations respect for the forest, good forest management and reforestation, which, of course, presupposed the mobilization of considerable resources. France, for its part, was prepared to participate in a regional reforestation programme for halting the encroachment of the desert, with which States, public and private forestry institutions and non-governmental organizations would be associated.

33. It was to be hoped that the debate in the Committee would mark a fresh advance in concerted action against desertification and drought and would also make a useful contribution to the in-depth consideration of the economic situation in Africa to be undertaken by the General Assembly. In any case it would have helped to launch future deliberations on desertification with a renewed awareness of the serious problems involved.

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34. Mr. AKAKPO (Togo) said that his country, which was one of the 34 drought-stricken African countries, was seriously concerned by the steady southward advance of the Sahara. In terms of climate, Togo was practically cut in half. In the south, the climate was sub-equatorial; the climate in the north was of the Sudanese type, intensified during the dry season by the harmattan. In economic terms, Togo was essentially an agricultural country, the farm sector accounting on average for 27 per cent of its GDP and employing some 75 per cent of the economically active population. The rural sector grew crops for domestic consumption as well as cash crops for export. The past 10 years had been marked by a growing aridity of the ecosystem due to both natural and man-made phenomena. That situation had obliged the public authorities to adjust the national development plans so as to take account of the fragility of the areas concerned. Desertification and drought in the north had had adverse consequences for the south, where the flow of watercourses rising in the north had diminished or had dried up.

35. The spread of those phenomena had had the immediate effect of bringing about an alarming drop in food production (Togo's annual demographic growth rate being 2.78 per cent) and the loss of thousands of hectares under export crops such as coffee, cocoa and cotton.

36. In face of that situation, the Togolese Government had not remained inactive, but the immediate measures taken had proved insufficient. The great drought which had befallen the country in 1982 and 1983, necessitating emergency intervention by FAO, had convinced the authorities that, in order to be effective, the fight against desertification and drought required concerted action by the international community. Togo had therefore requested in 1983 to be included in the list of countries entitled to benefit from the assistance of UNSO, and it was gratified to note that the Governing Council of UNEP had decided at its last session to comply with that request.

37. The Secretary-General's trip at the beginning of the year to a number of African countries, including Togo, had enabled him to appreciate the extent of the damage - severe food shortages, movements of population in search of food and water and, in some countries, a halt to the economic and social development process. In the last-mentioned case, the problem was no longer one of development but of survival. It was thus easy to understand the urgent appeal of the Dakar Ministerial Conference. Among emergency measures, his delegation recommended not only an increase in the financial resources of the relevant international organizations, in particular UNEP and UNSO, but also the acceptance as the Dakar Conference had urged on the international community, of the category of CSDD (countries stricken by desertification and drought), so that henceforward the countries concerned could receive priority assistance in implementing their development plans and action programmes.

38. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh), after recalling the analysis given by the Executive Director of UNEP (A/C.2/39/SR.17), said that in many African countries average per capita income was less than it had been 15 years earlier. The deficit on current account of the African countries had increased from \$1.6 billion in 1980

(Mr. Chowdhury, Bangladesh)

to \$24.7 billion in 1982. Because of the deterioration in their terms of trade, the annual loss of external resources was equivalent to their total aid receipts. The debt service obligation of the sub-Saharan African countries, which had risen by 25 per cent in 1982, was projected to increase by 60 per cent in 1983.

39. Once a food surplus continent, Africa was importing three times as much as 10 years previously, and 20 per cent of its cereal needs were being met through imports. Agricultural production was declining almost everywhere. The fall in commodity prices had been particularly devastating south of the Sahara. Thus, receipts from coffee and cocoa, principal commodity exports, now bought less than half the imports of 1976, and were expected to go on declining for the remainder of the decade. The price of copper had reached its lowest level since the Second World War. Real capital formation had declined by almost 6 per cent in the vast majority of African countries. Lastly, 26 of the 36 least developed countries were in Africa and their condition had deteriorated considerably.

40. It was important to realize that those figures did not reflect the full scope of the difficulties and additional hardships associated with drought and desertification. Furthermore, as the Committee for Development Planning had demonstrated, Africa's problems had multiple causes and differed from country to country.

41. While welcoming the fact that the problem had been listed as a separate item on the agenda, his delegation believed that the debate would be meaningful only if it led to concrete action to reverse the socio-economic decline of the countries affected under short-, medium- and long-term programmes encompassing all the dimensions of the problem. No matter how difficult the challenge, it was within the capacity of the international community to respond to it.

42. Mr. SECKA (Gambia) said that the problem of drought and desertification could not be appraised without reference to the impact of the international economic environment on the economies of the countries suffering from those two scourges which belonged to the group of least developed countries, which had been that most severely affected by the global recession and which had benefited least from the recent economic recovery in the industrialized countries. The recurrent drought of the last decade had had an even more devastating effect in the context of their economic stagnation, not to say regression, brought about by endogenous and exogenous factors.

43. The world economy had gone through a downturn comparable in scope to the depression of the 1930s. The developed countries, suffering from stagflation, monetary instability and unemployment, had resorted to protectionism. Recovery in some industrialized countries should not hide the fact that really all of the developing countries continued to suffer the effects of the long recession of the 1970s. They had been compelled to borrow at unprecedented levels and extremely high interest rates. The debt crisis of the developing countries had been exacerbated by the decline in domestic production and export earnings, itself due to the worst drop in commodity prices for 50 years.

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(Mr. Secka, Gambia)

44. The developing countries had accordingly been compelled to adopt retrenchment policies that substantially reduced the provision of essential public services such as housing, education and nutritional support.

45. Poor agricultural performance over more than a decade and steady population growth, together with the global recession, had culminated in an alarming food situation. In the sub-Saharan African countries, drought, resulting in the massive destruction of food crops and livestock, had raised the spectre of hunger and malnutrition. Despite their immense financial difficulties, the developing countries had become the world's largest importers of food, while their share of agricultural trade had declined substantially. The measures proposed by FAO for world food security, only minimally implemented, had been unable to prevent the poorer developing nations from continuing to experience serious food shortages.

46. The international community's responsibility should not be underestimated: it had failed to reach the target of 18.5 million tons a year for food aid in the form of cereals, or the target of 500,000 tons of cereals for setting up an international emergency food reserve. Furthermore, there was growing reticence by the donor community in the matter of increasing aid programmes for agriculture. Both bilateral and multilateral assistance had declined sharply, as was reflected in the difficulties faced by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the International Development Association (IDA). Thus the seventh replenishment of IDA was to be limited to \$9 billion instead of the \$16 billion needed. The international community must summon without delay the political will needed to provide massive aid programmes for food and agriculture in developing countries.

47. Drought and desertification had so serious an impact on the economies of the majority of African countries that it was unlikely that the global economic recovery would bring about sustained growth in those countries. There would have to be action on several fronts, increasing the availability of resources for funding the major production sectors of food production, livestock development, the development of renewable sources of energy, with emphasis on reforestation, and improved water supply.

48. Given the magnitude of the environmental constraints, assistance must be expanded to take account of the peculiar problems of drought and desertification. The Gambia welcomed the aid provided to the Sahelian countries by UNSO, UNEP and UNDP and strongly recommended an increased allocation of resources to UNSO which carried out anti-desertification activities in the subregion on behalf of UNDP.

49. Mr. DAMA (Burkina Faso) said that apart from climatic and external factors, man was responsible for drought and desertification when he introduced a type of agriculture involving the systematic destruction of the plant cover and the over-exploitation of soil and grazing land, not to mention bushfires and the failure to harness surface and ground water. Drought and desertification were decimating the greatest assets of most of the countries affected, namely livestock, which had less and less food and water.

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(Mr. Dama, Burkina Faso)

50. In order to combat the consequences of those two scourges, the people must be permanently mobilized to undertake practical activities concerned with water management, the rational use of existing natural resources and the establishment and improvement of infrastructure and means of transport in order to provide access to rural areas.

51. With bilateral and multilateral aid, Burkina Faso had started to implement those measures. Reservoirs were being built, wells dug and thousands of trees planted. The Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of the Environment and Tourism were organizing seminars aimed at promoting knowledge of agroforestry technology in order to increase agricultural production and save the country from drought and desertification. In April 1984, workshops had been organized at Ouagadougou for rural development specialists. The aim had been to simplify the State's relations with the rural world. The recently established Water Ministry should help to solve urgent problems of water supply. The People's Development Plan gave priority to activities to combat drought and desertification.

52. In order to be successful, those efforts should have outside support and be an integral part of a regional strategy. In that connection, Burkina Faso welcomed the co-operation of CILSS with UNSO but noted that certain constraints had unfortunately prevented any perceptible progress in the subregion. It was regrettable that the Ouagadougou Regional Remote Sensing Centre, whose desertification control activities were not insignificant, could not fully live up to the expectation of the inhabitants because of a lack of financial and logistic support. Despite the numerous resolutions in which the United Nations General Assembly had requested the international community to provide financial and technical support for the efforts of the countries affected to implement the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, the contributions fell far short of the needs. His delegation therefore supported the recommendations of the Dakar Ministerial Conference. Burkina Faso, which had participated in that Conference, was ready to do its utmost at the bilateral level as well as within existing subregional and regional bodies, to ensure a practical follow-up to those recommendations.

53. Mr. DE LA TORRE (Argentina) said that problems of drought and desertification had become so acute, especially in Africa, that it was imperative to take concerted action to solve them. Argentina was not immune from those scourges: the desert was advancing over vast areas of Patagonia and the Pampas as well as in the north-east and north-west. The causes were natural, but also economic. The critical situation of Africa could not fail to inspire Argentina to work to eradicate those scourges. The Executive Director of UNEP had correctly summed up the situation. There was certainly a close link between desertification and various social and economic problems, such as the unequal terms of trade, over-population and misuse of arable land. The roots of the evil must be attacked, taking into account its recurrent nature and the need to be prepared so as to reduce its impact.

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(Mr. de la Torre, Argentina)

54. His delegation supported the final resolution adopted by the Dakar Ministerial Conference, which had recognized the connection between the uneven development of certain regions and the deterioration of the environment, especially in Africa, where the lack of essential resources - water, energy, industries, transport and communications - further increased the effects of the world economic crisis. If the problem was to be properly tackled, it was essential to follow up the recommendations of the meeting on the establishment of co-ordination and assessment bodies for desertification control activities and the institution at all levels (educational, cultural and social) of a systematic campaign to inform, alert and mobilize the people. The appeal for South-South co-operation with a view to designing and executing programmes to combat desertification opened up wide prospects for a joint effort.

55. His delegation had examined with interest document A/39/433, which reported the results obtained by UNEP and UNSO. Argentina welcomed the steps taken by UNEP to combat desertification and drought. At the most recent session of the Economic and Social Council, Argentina had fully supported the report of the Governing Council of UNEP, especially decision 12/10 on desertification. In that connection, Argentina had allocated \$1 million for technical co-operation with developing countries to help them in their fight against that scourge. There was, however, no doubt that UNEP's work would better serve the interests of the developing countries if regional offices were established to enable desertification control activities to be decentralized. The slowness of the desertification process was such that, for some people the phenomenon might go unnoticed. However, the Middle East and North Africa, once agricultural regions, had become arid zones in a few centuries. A longer-term perspective revealed that what appeared unchangeable did in fact evolve.

56. His delegation shared the concern expressed by the Executive Director of UNEP at the gap between the sums necessary to continue the activities of that body and the amount of resources allocated for the next biennium, namely \$60 million instead of the \$74 million which would be needed. That lack of resources could have an impact not only on UNEP but also on all the programmes associated with it. That situation was all the more paradoxical because billions of dollars were swallowed up each year in the arms race. The United Nations must do everything possible to ensure that that situation was only temporary and to continue to deserve the trust placed in it.

57. Mr. PAGGANWALA (Pakistan) said that the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification had not prevented the phenomenon from spreading in all parts of the world and having the most devastating effects in Africa. The substantial decline in agricultural production in areas which were already at the subsistence level, the decimation of livestock and the chronic food shortages due to desertification had reduced the capacity of the affected countries to deal with famine and mass population movements. The struggle of those countries at the national, regional, and subregional levels was further complicated by the negative consequences of the crisis in the world economic system. The international community must provide massive support for the efforts of the developing countries to counter

(Mr. Pagganwala, Pakistan)

desertification and combat the effects of drought. In that context, it was sad to note from the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (A/39/433) that the promises made had not been kept. The commendable efforts of UNEP needed further support. It was to be hoped that positive results would be achieved during the current session of the General Assembly.

58. Pakistan was also a victim of the dual evils of desertification and drought. The best agricultural lands were becoming waterlogged and saline. Recent increases in agricultural production had been achieved by massive investment of human and capital resources, sometimes at the expense of the development of other sectors of the economy. His delegation therefore fully supported the initiative of the Government of Senegal to identify countries stricken by desertification and drought which should be given assistance on a priority basis in combating desertification.

59. Mr. Kaabachi (Tunisia) took the Chair.

60. Mr. MOTAI (Japan) said that, in the view of his delegation, it was much more difficult to reclaim land once it had become desert than it was to prevent desertification. The Governments concerned should thus strive to attain two objectives: to halt desertification wherever possible, and to regenerate land already claimed by desert. To achieve the first goal, overgrazing and the destruction of forests for use as fuel wood should be prevented. To recover lost land, the development of nurseries, reforestation, irrigation and any other relevant techniques should be encouraged. The Governments concerned should pool their efforts at the regional and subregional levels to combat the common enemy, by means, in particular, of co-operation and the exchange of information.

61. At the international level, aid to countries affected by desertification might increase if international public opinion was made more aware of the problem and if recipient countries accorded higher priority to anti-desertification measures. UNEP could promote such awareness, and other United Nations organizations, such as UNDP and FAO, could accord higher priority to the formulation and implementation of anti-desertification programmes.

62. The Japanese Government and people were sympathetic to the sufferings of the African victims of desertification and were trying to help them. In May 1984, Japan had pledged food assistance amounting to more than \$100 million to affected African countries. Collections had been organized throughout the country, as had seminars and other programmes to make the Japanese people more aware of the problem.

63. Mr. SUDEN (Federal Republic of Germany) said that his Government had welcomed Senegal's initiative of holding a Ministerial Conference on Desertification to develop a concerted policy to combat desertification, a phenomenon which was spreading in a spectacular fashion and which had catastrophic consequences for the populations of regions affected by it.

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(Mr. Suden, Federal Republic
of Germany)

64. Desertification was not caused solely by dry climates or an unforeseeable lack of seasonable rainfall. It was due largely to man and the way in which he used land, vegetation and natural resources in general.

65. In order to arrest or reverse the process of desertification, those concerned should tackle the causes of the problem, such as the ever-widening discrepancy between available resources and the needs of a steadily growing population, together with the depletion of resources without recourse to proper regenerative practices such as reafforestation and soil conservation. It was evident, however, that such efforts would not be successful without encouragement and support from the Governments of the stricken countries and international assistance. In that context, it was encouraging to note that at the Ministerial Conference those countries had themselves firmly undertaken to combat desertification and to adopt national strategies and plans. It was of particular importance to create awareness, and encourage further participation at the grass-roots level. He welcomed the fact that the strategy adopted by the developing countries concerned was not purely national, and could therefore provide the basis for action on a broader scale and in a more coherent and co-ordinated manner.

66. The Federal Republic of Germany was prepared to devote a greater share of its development aid to programmes to combat desertification. His Government had spent more than DM 300 million since 1974 on such programmes and had, in 1980, placed a co-ordinator in Burkina Faso who co-operated with CILSS. His Government also participated in the work of the UNEP Consultative Group for Desertification Control.

67. Such steps were, however, modest, given the extent of the problem. The struggle against desertification required a co-ordinated approach and the participation of the stricken countries, of international organizations such as UNDP (including UNSO), UNEP and the World Bank, and of bilateral donors and non-governmental organizations.

68. Mr. HOUNGAVOU (Benin) said that his country was one of the 34 African countries stricken by drought and desertification. The survival of people and livestock was threatened, and the Government had declared the entire country a disaster area.

69. An emergency relief programme, prepared and carried out with the assistance of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and UNDP had averted the worst, and his delegation wished to thank those organizations, the United Nations system and donor countries for the technical and financial assistance they had provided.

70. The Sahara Desert was advancing by some 10 kilometres a year, and although the situation in West Africa seemed for the time being to be less dramatic than that in East Africa, the threat posed by desertification and drought could not be ignored. Greater awareness of the phenomenon was needed so as to improve understanding and combat it in a determined, coherent and effective manner.

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(Mr. Hougavou, Benin)

71. The praiseworthy efforts by the international community had been systematized in 1977 with the adoption of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. UNSO and UNDP were devoting major efforts to the scientific study of the phenomenon and its effects, and to the formulation of programmes to control it.

72. Benin had received aid from UNEP and UNSO to define a global and short-, medium- and long-term strategy in the struggle against desertification. In co-operating with FAO, under its national reforestation programme Benin had been able to determine the investments required and had realized the need to co-ordinate national plans of action at the regional and continental levels. In that context, Benin had welcomed the initiative taken by the Senegalese Government in organizing a conference on the problem of desertification.

73. Relying on its own endeavours and its meagre resources, the Government had successfully undertaken, principally at the local authority level, a vast programme of reforestation and brush fire control. Such sectoral activities would be successful only if they were inserted in a co-ordinated programme, which would require financial support from the international community.

74. The struggle against drought and desertification was the concern of all. Accordingly, he hoped that the debate in the Second Committee would result in the mobilization of the international community and the organizations of the United Nations system and would make it possible to tackle the problem of sources of finance.

75. Mr. STARACE (Italy) said that his country had been actively participating for several years in efforts to find lasting solutions to the problem of desertification. In Africa, that phenomenon jeopardized development prospects and, above all, posed an immediate threat to the very existence of the populations of many countries already among the most disadvantaged in the continent.

76. Italy had participated in the Conference held at Dakar in July 1984, which had provided an opportunity to focus attention again on the urgent need to organize the struggle to halt and reverse the process of desertification and to define the guidelines for action to be taken. The joint efforts of the countries concerned should be co-ordinated and directed at the real causes of the phenomenon, but co-ordinated and effective technical and financial support by the international community remained indispensable.

77. Italy would continue to help the drought-stricken countries to survive the acute phase of the crisis: at the same time, however, it was necessary to create conditions to enable Africa to return to the path of development. It was important, therefore, to achieve a balance between short-term action to prevent the process of desertification from acquiring a structural and irreversible character and longer-term action to overcome the phenomenon and reactivate development.

78. Italy contributed to the activities of the European Economic Community in that area. In addition, it provided the largest contribution to the general resources of UNDP and was one of the principal contributors to UNCDF. Together with those

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(Mr. Starace, Italy)

two bodies, it had initiated a series of multilateral co-operation projects, many of which were directly related to desertification control. The projects financed by his country within the framework of UNSO activities were estimated to cost more than \$7 million. Italy had also provided 44.8 per cent of the funds gathered so far by UNICEF in response to the Executive Director's appeal to promote initiatives for Africa. Lastly, the bilateral aid which Italy granted to States members of CILSS amounted to \$500 million.

79. Within the framework of bilateral and multilateral co-operation, Italy's efforts would always be aimed at devising and executing programmes which took account of the needs of the recipient countries and of their economic and social conditions. The international community should show its solidarity with the countries stricken by desertification and its confidence in their capacity for recovery and economic development.

80. Mr. HASSON (Democratic Yemen) said that his country had suffered for a number of years from the phenomenon of desertification, which jeopardized the future of agricultural and livestock development because Democratic Yemen did not have the resources to combat the scourge. In 1981 and 1982, Democratic Yemen had also been stricken by floods, which had caused heavy loss of human life, crops and livestock. The floods had accelerated soil erosion and had made a large proportion of arable land unsuitable for agriculture.

81. He thanked the international community for the support given to his country in its efforts to remedy the immediate effects of those disasters. He hoped that that support would not be withdrawn and that his country would be assisted in combating the long-term effects of those disasters and desertification. In that regard, he welcomed the suggestions in the report on the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (A/39/433) and hoped that his country would be able to apply some of them within the framework of the programme carried out by UNEP in co-operation with ECWA. He also welcomed the recommendations contained in the report of the UNEP Governing Council (A/39/25) with regard to combating desertification and promoting awareness among Governments of that important problem. The report confirmed that the problem of desertification was not solely a matter for the Governments of the countries concerned, but also involved the international community as a whole.

82. Mr. GOBEIL (Canada) noted that the severity of the problem of desertification and drought not only generated concern, but also raised a number of questions regarding the capacity of the international community to overcome the problem. The very existence of the stricken countries was at stake. The factors which combined to accentuate desertification were at the same time natural, human and technical. Since the causes and effects of the phenomenon were not restricted to national borders, a regional approach should be adopted. It was also necessary to analyse the causes of breakdowns in the socio-ecological balance, to devise measures to stop them and change present trends, and to elaborate a coherent and co-ordinated global strategy aimed above all at restoring the balance which climatic and human factors now put at risk. Such a strategy required financial support well beyond the

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(Mr. Gobeil, Canada)

capacities of the countries involved. Since resources were not unlimited, closer consultation and co-ordination should be provided between the parties concerned in order to avoid wastage, save time and prevent overlapping.

83. For nearly a year, Canada had been stressing to the CILSS countries that the major problem of the Sahelian countries was the deterioration of the environment, and that the region was barely surviving rather than developing. At the fifth conference of the Club du Sahel, held in 1983, Canada had proposed the elaboration of a strategy of intervention aimed at establishing a new socio-ecological order in the Sahel. It hoped to be able to establish the basis of that strategy when the regional seminar on desertification control was held at Nouakchott. Canada, in collaboration with the Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, had defined a long-term programme of intervention aimed at contributing to the achievement of a new socio-ecological balance in the Sahel. Under that programme, Canada would support the efforts of the Sahelian countries to stabilize plant cover, the food balance and energy development.

84. Mr. TYSCHENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the Soviet Union was keenly aware of the difficulties faced by many African countries because of desertification and drought, and duly appreciated their efforts to overcome them. The seriousness of the situation was well known. A good deal of information was available to quantify its scale. Africa was the most seriously affected by desert creep, but some Asian and American regions also suffered from that phenomenon.

85. The Soviet Union had also been affected by the problem. In the early years of Soviet power, a decree entitled "drought control" had been adopted on Lenin's initiative. Since that time, many formerly arid areas had been developed, especially in Turkmenia and the "Hungry Steppe", using modern techniques (irrigation, forest protection). Those efforts had played an important role in combating desertification on our planet.

86. In October 1984, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had approved a long-term plan for land improvement. The General Secretary of the Central Committee and President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Mr. K. U. Chernenko, had indicated that the programme would make it possible to double yields from the improved areas and provide almost one half of the total agricultural production, irrespective of climatic conditions.

87. On the basis of its experience, the Soviet Union provided considerable assistance to the developing countries in combating desertification. International courses had been organized in Turkmenia with the participation of UNEP, in accordance with the recommendation contained in the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. The Soviet Union, in collaboration with UNEP, had implemented some 30 projects in recent years to train specialists from the developing countries in areas such as sand dune fixation and range management. International courses on agro-meteorology had been organized recently in the Soviet Union with the participation of UNEP and WMO.

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(Mr. Tyschenko, USSR)

88. The USSR was actively developing bilateral co-operation with developing countries. As part of that co-operation, projects for the reclamation of arid land had been or were being implemented in Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, the Sudan and many other countries.

89. On the basis of its own experience, the USSR endorsed the provisions of the final resolution of the Dakar Conference concerning the mobilization of all domestic resources, the preparation of national strategies to combat drought and desertification, the integration of those strategies in global plans of socio-economic development and the participation of all levels of the population in such efforts. The call to African countries to unite their efforts at the regional level was equally important. In that regard, the rapprochement with east African countries for which participants in the Conference had expressed a wish should be encouraged.

90. The tasks defined at Dakar presupposed that the Governments of African countries would play a central role in the preparation and conduct of a common policy to combat desertification. The Soviet delegation believed that to be the only possible approach. It did not see how the "magical market forces", whose omnipotence certain delegations at the United Nations liked to evoke, could operate in the existing situation. Indeed, they only operated when there were possibilities of making profits by exploiting the natural wealth of other countries. But deserts were scarcely profitable. Merely managing them demanded considerable investment. In such conditions, market forces "generally" made way for Governments. It was quite legitimate to wonder why Africa's very rich economic potential could not be fully developed. That question should not be posed in the abstract. It should be put to those who were truly responsible for the current situation and they should be required to pay compensation for the damage caused.

91. The Soviet delegation understood the motives which had caused certain countries taking part in the Dakar Conference to propose the establishment at the United Nations of a new category of "countries stricken by desertification and drought" and it was ready to consider the proposal. But it doubted if the act of adding a new expression to the international vocabulary was likely to make it easier to overcome natural phenomena and, above all, eliminate the profound causes of the problems encountered by African States. For its part, the USSR would continue to provide aid to those countries, in accordance with its means, and to participate with determination in UNEP activities to combat drought and desertification.

92. Mr. Harland (New Zealand) resumed the Chair.

93. Mr. CHOO ENG GUAN (Malaysia) said that the very fact of discussing desertification and drought showed the magnitude of the problem and the urgent need to address the situation. A UNEP report had identified 91 countries as being stricken by desertification, drought and other natural disasters. Many of those countries were on the African continent.

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(Mr. Choo Eng Guan, Malaysia)

94. Indeed, the current economic crisis in Africa had been made worse by the combined effects of an adverse international economic environment and a persistent drought. If allowed to continue, the crisis would cause the disintegration of the economic and social fabric of the countries affected. That was why Malaysia wished to repeat the sentiments expressed in the Declaration of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77 at their eighth annual meeting (A/39/536). Malaysia also wished to reaffirm its solidarity with the affected countries and intended to give priority to the issue at the current session of the General Assembly.

95. The World Food Council in its report to the thirty-ninth session of the General Assembly (A/39/19) had identified the drought conditions in Africa as a principal cause of the critical food situation. Malaysia had joined in bilateral and multilateral aid efforts in a modest way by sending rice to Mali as emergency aid, but it recognized that such efforts were only short-term measures. In the medium and long term, the countries suffering the worst drought conditions would need help to develop their own capabilities for effective drought control and to progress to food self-sufficiency. In that connection, Malaysia welcomed the information provided by the Secretary-General on the combined efforts of UNEP and FAO to study the drought situation in Zambia (A/39/408).

96. While the efforts made by UNEP, UNSO, WMO, FAO, UNESCO and other agencies were commendable, they had not been able to avert desertification. There was still no understanding of the phenomenon. Further efforts should therefore be exerted, not only to stop the advancing desert, but also to reclaim it for productive purposes.

97. Malaysia was concerned over the problems caused by desertification. That was why it had co-sponsored the draft resolution entitled "Implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification" at the second regular session of the Economic and Social Council in 1984 (resolution 1984/65). The resolution called upon all Governments and organizations to strengthen their support for countries in the Sudano-Sahelian region. In that regard, Malaysia was heartened by the efforts undertaken by UNEP, by the Consultative Group for Desertification Control to mobilize financing for the 18 high-priority project proposals, and by the Inter-Agency Working Group on Desertification in co-operation with the United Nations agencies concerned with implementing the medium-term environment programme for 1984-1985. Malaysia also welcomed the UNEP proposal to launch a comprehensive public information exercise to promote more effective implementation of the Plan of Action and drought control in affected and donor countries. The efforts being made by UNSO in conjunction with UNESCO and CILSS were also to be commended. Malaysia hoped that the joint efforts of the various United Nations organizations, governmental and non-governmental organizations and donor countries might begin to arrest the problems caused by desertification and drought.

98. Mr. HAMBAYI (Zambia) said rainfall had been subnormal and erratic in his country for three years and that had led to serious crop failures, particularly of maize, which was the staple food of most Zambians. Five hundred thousand people were currently threatened by famine and malnutrition. In some parts of the country, water problems were being experienced and farmers had been forced to

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(Mr. Hambayi, Zambia)

reduce their animal herds, which had serious implications for the future of the beef industry. In 1984, Zambia would need to import about \$200 million worth of maize, wheat and rice. The food problems arising from drought were made worse by the international economic situation. As a result of the fall in commodity prices over the past 10 years, Zambia's earnings from exports of metals and minerals, mainly copper, had steadily declined and the country was currently in debt. High interest rates and unfavourable exchange rates had made debt-servicing a drag on the economy. Foreign exchange resources which should have been allocated to development were now being used to pay for food imports.

99. It had always been Zambia's policy to give agriculture priority in its development programmes. The aims of Zambia's agricultural development programme were: (a) to achieve food self-sufficiency and food surpluses for export; (b) to produce raw materials for agriculture-based industries; and (c) to slow the exodus from rural areas by spreading the benefits of economic development and employment opportunities throughout the country.

100. In order to reduce the future impact of drought the following actions were being taken at the national level: (a) farmers were being encouraged to grow drought-resistant crops as substitutes for maize and as industrial raw materials; (b) water reservoirs and dams were being constructed to conserve water for human and livestock consumption and irrigation; (c) research in crop varieties with short maturities was being intensified; and (d) food storage and post-harvest handling were being improved in order to avoid food losses and to achieve food security.

101. He appealed to the international community to alleviate immediate food problems in the countries seriously affected by drought and, more important, to assist those countries to integrate environmental control and agricultural development within their national development programmes.

102. Mr. MOUNKEILA (Niger) said that the issue under discussion was too well known but also misunderstood. It was well known because the consequences of drought and desertification made sensational headlines in the media. It was misunderstood because practically nothing was known of their causes. Some had blamed the incompetence of those in charge and the laziness of Africans. That answer was too simplistic. Fortunately, voices had been raised on all continents to denounce the scandalous persistence of famine, while the world had the means to feed millions of human beings.

103. The Sahel had formerly been a verdant region where fauna and flora had flourished. The population had worked on the land every month of the year. In short, people had been happy. But soon the rainfall had dwindled. Woodlands had been cleared, the streams had dried up and the animal population had fallen. The inhabitants nevertheless managed to survive. In 1968 however the nightmare had appeared. During that year countless animals had perished. The nadir had been reached in 1973 and 1974: not only the animals but also men and women had died. The Sahelians had then been compelled to beg for aid.

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(Mr. Mounkeila, Niger)

104. Much had however been done to give renewed hope to the Sahel: the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the Club du Sahel and the United Nations Trust Fund for Sudano-Sahelian Activities had been established; UNDP and CILSS had jointly prepared the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. All those activities had not however prevented the Sahel from changing its character and becoming a semi-desert region.

105. In those conditions, it might well be asked why so much effort had been expended. As the Secretary-General had pointed out in his note on the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (A/39/433), increased awareness of desertification had been aroused. Such increased awareness must however be used in order to place the problems of drought and desertification in proper perspective. In that connection appeals had been launched and initiatives had been taken by such leading figures as President Diouf, President Kountche and the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

106. The President of the Niger, Mr. Seyni Kountche, who was to have addressed the General Assembly at its thirty-ninth session but had been prevented from doing so by a particularly disastrous agricultural situation had himself taken a number of initiatives: in particular, he had proclaimed 1984 to be the Year of National Reforestation, had created a national reforestation commission and had organized a national debate on the combat against desertification from 21 to 28 May 1984, with substantial foreign participation, that had led to the Maradi Agreement. That agreement had expressed the will of an entire people and comprised a national plan of action to slow and arrest the advance of the desert. Reference must also be made to the reforestation operations launched by the Government, in addition to the traditional "Green Sahel" campaign: each department was required to reforest 15 hectares, each district 10 hectares and each administrative post 5 hectares.

107. To the extent that the Niger could only cultivate 12 per cent of its land area for its subsistence needs, it was vitally necessary to protect that productive area as it could not be enlarged. It was for that reason, that the Niger had, since 1974, undertaken a campaign of water resources management through flood control measures, retention barrages, small dams and water and soil protection. Financing for major works, such as the Kandadji dam, had not always been available. Such a situation was to be deplored because water control was of capital importance for the development of food self-sufficiency. A single bad season could ruin a country's efforts to achieve that goal. That was what had happened in 1984 in the Niger and other Sudano-Sahelian countries. Following an exceptional drought, the Niger had suffered a cereal deficit of between 500,000 and 600,000 tons, which the State could not cover.

108. The international community must act quickly. Each year, the Sahel was losing almost one tenth of the area of the Niger and one third of the area of Senegal to the Sahara. If action was delayed, it would be too late; there would be nobody to help. Aware of the approach of that apocalypse, the President of Senegal, Mr. Diouf, had convened the Dakar Conference which had initiated the preparation of a realistic strategy to combat drought and, more particularly, desertification.

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(Mr. Mounkeila, Niger)

The countries affected by drought could recover; those attacked by desertification would never recover. That scourge called for shock therapy, for huge resources and the strengthening of structures, particularly CILSS and UNSO.

109. Mr. FIELD (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) said desertification and drought were two environmental phenomena which were having a devastating effect on the lives of millions of people. The international community had not been unresponsive. His own Government had announced over £30 million of drought-related aid during 1984. It had also decided to allocate an additional 6,000 tons of food aid to Ethiopia together with £6 million for famine relief in Ethiopia and other African countries.

110. All such aid was vital but it did not tackle the basic problems. What was required was to arrest desertification, establish sound and sustainable land use and advance the social and economic life of the affected communities. Those three activities were interdependent and must include measures to reduce the pressure of people on the land, particularly by developing alternative sources of food and fuel and efforts to stabilize the population.

111. The Dakar Conference had drawn attention to the need for national strategies to arrest desertification. That was the responsibility of the Governments concerned. They should be assisted in terms both of technique and finance within the framework of bilateral or multilateral agreements. The United Kingdom was ready to provide Governments with technical assistance to help them prepare programmes to combat desertification.

112. The United Nations, and particularly UNEP, had an important co-ordinating role to play. The Plan of Action to Combat Desertification which had emerged from the United Nations Conference on Desertification in 1977 had been usefully refined during the latest session of the UNEP Governing Council. The United Kingdom hoped to see UNEP's Desertification Branch strengthened and the Consultative Group on Desertification Control given a more policy-oriented role. His delegation also welcomed the work done by UNSO. The United Kingdom believed that such machinery could be effective in helping to combat desertification, provided it functioned well. Food aid was a form of short-term assistance which was absolutely necessary but it was of equal importance to assist the Governments concerned to prepare long-term strategies.

The meeting rose at 6.45 p.m.