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at 3 p.m.  
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 27th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HARLAND (New Zealand)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 80: DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION (continued) (A/39/3 (Part II), A/39/56, 71, 88, 95, 110, 118, 126, 131, 133, 187, 226, 236, 269, 302, 303, 304, 314, 323, 331, 448, 495, 536, 554, 560; A/C.2/39/3 and 4)

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1. Miss LIM (Singapore) said that although regional co-operation was proving quite effective - within the framework, in Asia, of such groupings as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Pacific Forum and the Gulf Co-operation Council - international economic co-operation was at an impasse as demonstrated by the recent failure of the Fourth General Conference of UNIDO. The targets set by the Lima Plan of Action were far from being reached. Singapore, for its part, was striving actively to restructure its industry and was encouraging vocational training so as to have a skilled labour force.

2. It supported the Caracas Programme of Action and urged the United Nations to facilitate the implementation of all programmes relating to economic and technical co-operation among developing countries. That type of co-operation should emphasize human resources development. The unmistakable link between investment in human resources and economic growth in the longer term had been noted in the Vienna Statement issued by the recent round-table on world monetary, financial and human resources development. In 1971, in the context of that co-operation, ASEAN had created a training awards scheme for nationals of member countries of the Association. Its aim was to increase ASEAN's self-reliance and regional co-operation. Singapore had always given high priority to human resources development. Under bilateral agreements it provided developing countries with technical assistance in areas in which it possessed the necessary expertise and training capacity. It also provided technical assistance through certain organizations of the United Nations system and through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. In spite of its limited financial resources it would endeavour, to the extent to which it was able, to continue helping other developing countries.

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3. Mr. DOMINGUEZ (Mexico), referring to the report of the Secretary-General on an analysis of the mandates of and problems addressed by, the United Nations system, in economic and technical co-operation among developing countries (A/39/154 and Corr.1), said that the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement were the two main international groupings which systematically encouraged economic and technical co-operation among developing countries at every level. The Group of 77, had just - 20 years after its creation - completed, within the framework of the Caracas Programme of Action, the phase of identifying precisely the areas of South-South co-operation.
4. The aim of such co-operation was to enable the developing countries to pool their resources in their mutual interest, to take full advantage of the complementarities of their economies and jointly to promote their social and economic development in the context of the new international economic order. The bases for South-South co-operation had been laid in 1955, at the Bandung Conference. Many international conferences since then had paved the way for co-operation between developing countries in specific areas, particularly the commercial, financial, monetary, energy and technical areas. That determination to act in concert should eventually bear fruit.
5. It was impressive to see that between 1964 and 1983, the United Nations system had received 445 mandates in the area of economic and technical co-operation among developing countries; most of them continued to be regarded as a valid basis for the adoption of specific measures and they covered nearly every area of co-operation, thereby demonstrating both the persistence with which the developing countries were seeking to strengthen international co-operation and the difficulties they had encountered in practice.
6. The Group of 77 was therefore urging the specialized agencies and regional commissions to devote a large part of their resources to supporting economic co-operation programmes drawn up by the developing countries, in particular the Caracas Programme of Action and Buenos Aires Plan of Action, so as to give a strategic dimension to South-South co-operation. That was one area of responsibility of the United Nations system and his delegation would continue to support every initiative to promote full implementation of the mandates of the United Nations bodies and to give due importance to South-South co-operation.
7. Mr. TURKI (Kuwait) said that international co-operation was a pillar of trust among countries and that co-operation among developing countries could give impetus to development and could have positive long-term implications for the entire international community. The United Nations must therefore play its role fully by contributing effectively to the promotion of economic and technical co-operation at the international level.
8. Effective industrialization, policies at the local level were essential in order to achieve satisfactory results, especially in the area of training and the adaptation of technology to the developing countries. International co-operation was also needed, for industrial development was much affected by the conditions of international trade. He deplored the reluctance demonstrated by the industrialized

(Mr. Turki, Kuwait)

countries at the Fourth General Conference of UNIDO, which had been intended to lay the bases for multilateral co-operation. Instead the Western countries had placed further obstacles in the way of the transfer of advanced technology to the developing countries.

9. The possible adverse ecological and demographic consequences of Israel's decision to build a canal linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea had been denounced by the UNEP governing council in decision 12/7 and the illegal practices of the Israeli occupying authorities in the occupied Palestinian territories had been revealed (document A/39/233). The situation in those territories had become so inhuman that Israel had refused to allow the team of consultants responsible for writing the report to enter the territories. The Arab countries and peoples in all the Arab territories occupied by Israel had the right, as had all nations, to dispose of their natural and other resources.

10. Kuwait was among the countries which were experiencing a food crisis and it was concerned at the inability of the international community to take effective emergency measures to ensure the food security of the countries affected by the famine, particularly in Africa. If international co-operation were based more on humanitarian considerations than on material ones it should be possible, with technical assistance to improve the agricultural production of those countries and to change the current balance of international trade.

11. Kuwait believed that the environment was an essential element of social and economic development, as demonstrated by its participation through the Gulf Co-operation Council in the fight to combat pollution and to protect the environment.

12. Mr. LUCAS (Guyana) said that, as a consequence of the magnitude and gravity of the economic crisis which had affected all countries over the past years, the international community had sought not only to minimize its effects but also to formulate strategies to overcome it and ensure a global economic recovery. The developing countries had contributed to that effort, as demonstrated by the Seventh Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held at New Delhi in 1983, and the Buenos Aires Platform adopted the same year. Signs of recovery had recently been noted in some developed countries, but the recovery did not appear to be durable or capable of spreading to all countries. Moreover, the failure to implement the set of immediate measures in General Assembly resolution 38/200 would postpone the economic take-off of the developing countries for an indefinite period. But the Committee could, at the present session, give a renewed impetus to international co-operation in such areas as industrialization which had been an important aspect of the North-South dialogue and could play a role in meeting the economic and social needs of developing countries. In order to achieve the industrialization objectives in the Lima and New Delhi Plans of Action, it was fundamental for those countries not only to have access to suitable technology but also to receive financial and technical assistance enabling them to strengthen their own technological capacity and thus attain self-sustained growth.

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(Mr. Lucas, Guyana)

13. Food and agriculture were another area which required collective action. While calling attention to the plight of millions of human beings suffering from hunger, the Executive Director of the World Food Council had noted that the international community had the capacity to cater to the food requirements of the entire world population. Efforts therefore should be redoubled to eliminate hunger and malnutrition in Africa and certain parts of Latin America. The technical and financial resources called for in General Assembly resolution 38/158 should be provided to the developing countries to help them increase their food production based on their national strategies and plans. To that end, the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and regional banks should provide adequate financial resources in response to the needs of developing countries in terms of agriculture and food.

14. The same applied to monetary and financial problems. Recent initiatives of the World Bank and the regional development banks to alleviate the payment difficulties of developing countries were encouraging, but their impact would be negligible if substantially increased funds were not made available to those agencies.

15. Lastly, the attitude of some developed countries to the involvement of the United Nations system in economic and technical co-operation activities among developing countries was a matter for concern, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guyana had stated in the plenary Assembly. His delegation therefore hoped that those countries would show their willingness to co-operate with and support South-South co-operation.

16. Mr. GERVAIS (Haiti) said that his Government was engaged in promoting the well-being of the population of Haiti through economic development in particular. Such an objective for a small over-populated country with few resources could be achieved only with the support of the international community.

17. His delegation was therefore pleased to note that co-operation between developed countries and developing countries was considered essential to international economic relations. Indeed, it was becoming more and more apparent that the development of one group was conditional on the continuing prosperity of the other. To that notion had been added a relatively new concept, that of co-operation among developing countries, which had very quickly led to a series of concrete actions.

18. Industrialization continued to occupy a central position in Haiti's development efforts. The assembly and import substitution industries were the most dynamic sector of its economy but they had suffered greatly from the world recession and measures that had had to be taken for their recovery had caused much hardship and a considerable increase in the cost of living.

19. In spite of those set-backs, his Government continued to believe that industrialization accompanied by adequate agricultural development was necessary for balanced economic growth. The strategies outlined in the development plan for the biennium 1985-1986 were designed accordingly.

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(Mr. Gervais, Haiti)

20. International co-operation could be especially beneficial in industrialization (the transfer of resources and technology, access to markets, etc.). His delegation therefore reaffirmed its unreserved support for the resolutions of the Fourth General Conference of UNIDO, especially resolution 6 on the implementation of the Substantial New Programme of Action for the least-developed countries. However, he deplored the fact that the two most effective draft resolutions for accelerating the industrial development of developing countries - on the mobilization of financial resources for industrialization and on the restructuring and redeployment of world industry - had not been adopted. He hoped that the General Assembly would reach a consensus on that issue. He added that his delegation was in favour of UNIDO becoming a specialized agency, which would enable it to play a more active role.

21. His delegation continued to be disturbed at the problem of world hunger. More than 500 million people were still suffering from hunger and malnutrition and it was doubtful that that age-old scourge could be eliminated in the space of three decades, as planned for in General Assembly resolution 35/36. Nevertheless, considerable experience had been acquired in the fight against hunger. It was now recognized that the problem of food production was closely linked to the development process itself.

22. Haiti was concerned at the decrease in official development assistance. The industrialized countries had not honoured the pledge that they had made in Paris to allocate 0.15 per cent of their GNP for that purpose.

23. In Haiti one of the major obstacles to food self-sufficiency was soil erosion, which was making it less and less possible to feed the growing population. That phenomenon, which dated back to the colonization era, had become worse over the years, especially as a result of the systematic and often thoughtless use of the country's vegetation. In addition to the harmful effects on the environment, it had led to a massive rural exodus. In order to remedy that situation, the Government had organized a large-scale reforestation and soil conservation programme with the aid of FAO and the International Development Association, but the success of the programme depended largely on the possibility of using other sources of energy and of mobilizing resources commensurate with the magnitude of the task.

24. His delegation was deeply concerned with the problems affecting Africa south of the Sahara and expressed its sympathy to countries stricken by drought and desertification. He was gratified to note that the United Nations was seeking solutions, but the task was enormous.

25. The problems of the developing countries were so complex and required such urgent solutions that they should be considered as a whole by the international community. The world recession no longer lent credence to the belief that the recovery in the industrialized countries would be sufficient to ensure the growth of the developing countries. More direct action was required. In that regard, Haiti especially believed in the need to re-establish international relations on a more equitable basis.

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26. Mr. HILLEL (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, noted with regret that the statements by the representatives of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen and other States concerning the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories had been motivated primarily by the intention to flood the Committee with invective regardless of the merits of the issues at hand. Israel categorically rejected the Secretary-General's report (A/39/233-E/1984/79) on the subject, because it ignored virtually all of Israel's rational and positive uses of existing resources for the good of all the inhabitants of the administered territories. Perhaps some of the representatives would be more satisfied if Israel followed the examples set by their countries where the State held absolute power over society. That was not the case in Israel, where democratic principles were applied. In the administered territories, progress had been made since 1967 in every field of human life, be it in education, health, social services, building activity, agriculture, industry or development in general. No amount of fanciful allegations, distorted reports and resolutions initiated by the so-called PLO would deter Israel from pursuing its policy for the betterment of the living conditions in the administered territories, because that policy promoted social and economic development, and maintained options open for a future peace process in the area.

27. Mr. RAJAEI (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, regretted the unfortunate and, he hoped, unintentional practice of referring to the body of water bordered by Iran to the north and east and a number of other countries to the south and west by a toponym other than its historically established and accepted designation as the "Persian Gulf". The Romans had called it Sinus Persicus, and the United Nations Secretariat, following historical practice, used the term "Persian Gulf" in the documents and maps that it prepared on its own responsibility.

28. Mr. SCOTT (United States of America), speaking in the exercise of the right of reply, protested against the fact that many delegations had stated that the Fourth General Conference of UNIDO had been a failure, which was patently false. That Conference, which had been able to adopt by consensus resolutions on energy, human resources, rural development, science and technology, and many other important issues, should be considered a success.

29. The representative of the German Democratic Republic had pointed out that the United States had been alone in voting against the so-called chapeau. In fact, the United States had been joined by 12 other developed countries (representing 50 per cent of the world's GNP) which could not support the chapeau because it did not portray the facts of the world economic situation and outlook in a balanced and accurate manner. The representative of the German Democratic Republic had also accused "one delegation" of turning the Second Committee into an "election campaign arena"; the United States had been surprised by that accusation since it came from a nation that had not witnessed a free election since its inception. Finally, the representative of the German Democratic Republic had characterized United States agricultural policy as inhuman when he had said that farmers received bonuses for fallow land to keep world market prices high. In fact, the United States objective was to allow farmers to concentrate resources on more productive tracts of land. As a result, grain stocks had continued to grow while prices had fallen. The

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(Mr. Scott, United States)

United States remained the world's largest food-aid donor and, in 1984 alone, had contributed about \$1.2 billion in bilateral technical assistance to agriculture and rural development in developing countries.

30. The representative of Zimbabwe, for his part, in addition to criticizing United States agricultural policy, had claimed to "draw to an end the free enterprise debate". But that debate had unquestionably ended long ago, considering the success of market economy countries throughout the world. African nations truly concerned with agricultural development were increasingly adopting policies aimed at market mechanisms and adequate incentives to agricultural producers, and the slogans of Lenin on that subject were completely obsolete. Other delegations which had condemned the turn towards free enterprise in the developing countries only demonstrated their ignorance of the real needs of those countries and further reinforced their irrelevance to the development process in general.

31. Mr. ABU-KOASH (Observer, Palestine Liberation Organization), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, protested strongly against Israel's claim that it was helping the Palestinians, while at that very moment it was occupying their territories. If Israel had really been promoting development in the occupied territories, it would not have prevented officials from United Nations bodies, such as UNIDO, UNCTAD, UNCHS (Habitat), or the experts commissioned to study the living conditions of the Palestinians, from entering its territories. Israel's deplorable economic situation was well known. If Israel could not help itself, how could it claim to promote the development of a people that it deprived of its liberty?

32. Mr. DIETZE (German Democratic Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, asserted that his statement had been completely justified and had been limited exclusively to international economic measures and to the solution of urgent international problems. Concerned about a constructive work atmosphere, the German Democratic Republic had simply referred to the statement of a delegation that had not favoured such a climate. With regard to the chapeau to the report of the Fourth General Conference of UNIDO, he recalled that there was a big difference between a vote against a draft resolution and an abstention. Finally, the United States representative would be well advised not to speak about issues with which he was not familiar, such as elections and freedom of speech in the German Democratic Republic.

33. Mr. TYSHENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the Soviet delegation would exercise its right of reply later.

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

34. Mr. SAVIC (Yugoslavia) said that the international community should provide urgent assistance to the countries stricken by drought, particularly in Africa, in order to eliminate the immediate and tragic consequences of that phenomenon: hunger and malnutrition. For its part, the Yugoslav Government had passed a decision to render assistance, in the fields of water resources, agriculture and food, to the countries in the Sudano-Sahelian region.

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(Mr. Savic, Yugoslavia)

35. Long-term measures to combat desertification required co-ordinated regional, national and international action. UNEP should be congratulated on its significant contribution to that cause.

36. He expected that the General Assembly at its current session would adopt urgent and concrete measures to assist the African countries stricken by drought.

37. Mr. CHIRAPANT (Thailand) said that desertification and drought had been threatening the living conditions of people and hindering development in many parts of the world, in particular in the Sudano-Sahelian region. It was for that reason that the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) had been established in 1973 to implement the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. The situation had once again become a cause for alarm. The Sahara Desert had been rapidly encroaching on parts of eastern, central and even southern Africa. Drought had wiped out fauna and flora and dried up sources of water. Those natural disasters compounded the problems caused by the unfavourable world economic situation. More than 150 million people in the region were suffering from starvation and malnutrition.

38. Despite numerous efforts undertaken by various United Nations agencies and individual countries, the situation had not improved significantly and assistance remained inadequate. In order to find a truly effective solution, there was a need for a consolidated strategy to combat desertification and a long-term development plan enjoying the support of the international community.

39. Recognizing that the primary responsibility for action to combat desertification lay with the countries concerned, his delegation welcomed the appointment of a Special Representative on the African social and economic crisis as well as the Secretary-General's recent visit to the affected areas. It was also gratifying to learn of the results of 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.

40. His delegation advocated the adoption of immediate steps to remedy the food shortages affecting more than 150 million people. The international community should continue to mobilize its efforts to provide increased assistance in that area.

41. Despite its limited resources, his country had approved further contributions of food to the World Food Programme for 1985-1986 as well as an assistance programme for the African countries to be executed through the United Nations. Moreover, it was assisting the developing countries in training skilled agricultural workers by providing fellowships and technical assistance and by organizing training courses and study tours as part of the Thai Aid Programme. The human dimension was a crucial factor in the process of overall development.

42. In order to improve the production of basic food crops, livestock and fisheries as a step towards food self-sufficiency, it was necessary to mobilize increased financial flows. In that connection, his delegation supported the call

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(Mr. Chirapant, Thailand)

made by the Dakar Conference for the financing and execution of development programmes in Africa.

43. The programmes undertaken under the Industrial Development Decade for Africa and the Transport and Communications Decade in Africa should be implemented as soon as possible, and national programmes for the management of water and other natural resources must be given high priority by the Governments of the countries concerned. Those projects would thus help to facilitate the delivery of food assistance and establish a base for internally generated development, by linking separate economic sectors.

44. It was the hope of his delegation that the General Assembly would strive for the consensus required for concerted tangible action to alleviate the plight of over 150 million people. For its part, his country would continue to co-operate with the African countries and the international organizations concerned in the struggle to overcome the scourges of drought and desertification.

45. Mr. PINTO (Brazil) said that his country knew only too well what drought and desertification could do. During the general debate at the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly, his country's Minister for Foreign Affairs had said that the north-eastern part of Brazil had been suffering from drought for five years. The endurance of the local population had been severely tested and regional development plans had met with enormous obstacles. While the effects of that protracted drought were properly his Government's responsibility, in the context of its national policies, they could not fail to have an impact on the foreign activities of the nation. His country had firmly supported the activities of the United Nations to combat desertification, especially in the Sudano-Sahelian region, as well as the measures designed to provide resources for the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. In a general sense, climatic phenomena should be examined from a long-distance perspective within the context of international co-operation.

46. Although drought created emergency situations, it was nevertheless cyclical in nature. It could be dealt with through preventive measures as well as through emergency aid. Desertification, however, was more dangerous in that it caused permanent damage. It affected more than 100 countries. The Plan of Action adopted in 1977 proposed to eliminate that scourge by the year 2000. After seven years of efforts, 6 million hectares continued to be lost to the desert each year and 8.4 million hectares were unproductive. Those unpromising statistics had led his Government to support the extension of the 1977 Plan of Action for an additional 10-year period.

47. Desertification was linked to a series of social and economic issues. In particular, it was associated with poverty and might well be caused by over-exploitation and the misuse of land resources, especially in a context of rapid population growth. Since it could therefore be overcome through balanced development which took environmental factors into account, it was extremely frustrating to realize that calls for international co-operation remained largely unheeded.

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(Mr. Pinto, Brazil)

48. His Government had studied with interest the resolution adopted by the Dakar Conference (A/39/530). The four principles concerning subregional, regional and international co-operation provided valid guidelines.

49. However, his country was not convinced of the need to create a special category of countries stricken by desertification and drought, even though Brazil would certainly be included in it. In his opinion, existing international instruments should be strengthened and, in that context, new avenues explored. His country, which was itself plagued by desertification and drought, would not fail to associate itself with those efforts.

50. Mr. KELLY (United States of America) said that the global war against desertification was clearly not being won. There were currently 135 million people thus affected as compared to 57 million in 1977; land lost to desertification each year amounted to an area larger than Senegal and it seemed possible that by the year 2000 another half billion people might be directly affected.

51. And yet, local battles in the war against desertification were being won: reforestation programmes in the Sind region and in the Punjab in Pakistan, in the Atlas Mountains in Algeria, in the Maja Valley in the Niger, and in Senegal and Somalia had led to the reclamation of hundreds of thousands of acres of land for production. The question therefore arose as to why such progress was being made at the local level when results at the global level were so dismal.

52. There was really no such thing as a "global war against desertification". That slogan did not correspond to any specific reality but had been useful during the 1970s to make people aware of the mounting world-wide crisis. The message had been heard. As the Executive Director of UNEP had said, Governments no longer needed to be convinced of the value of the environment to development. They were no longer asking why but rather how they should respond.

53. Representatives of the international community, who solemnly incanted the latest figures on the global desertification crisis, should apply as much creativity to getting trees planted. It was time for action at the national and regional levels.

54. There was no global remedy for desertification. In the last analysis, it was the smallholders, farmers and animal breeders who had to wage war on wind and soil erosion by applying their ingenuity and talent to the task. Assistance provided by national Governments and by the international community would be crucial in many cases.

55. During the 1970s, national Governments and donors had spent billions of dollars in an effort to halt desertification. It was estimated that the OECD countries had spent an average of a billion dollars annually for that purpose, without counting their multilateral aid outlays. The World Bank had sponsored 82 anti-desertification projects in 24 countries. Financial resources were therefore not lacking. The main obstacles in the campaign against desertification

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(Mr. Kelly, United States)

were, rather, rapid population increases, lack of resolve on the part of Governments, and donors' naïvete.

56. There had been some confusion, even within the Second Committee, about the causes of desertification. While it was true that drought could help to turn land into desert, it was not responsible for making vast areas of semi-arid land unproductive. Drought, no matter how severe, was ephemeral, whereas desertification left permanent scars and was caused by overcultivation, over-grazing and deforestation. It was generally the result of pressures created by rapid population growth.

57. Rural people were sometimes pilloried for causing environmental degradation because of their ignorance. It was as though rural women enjoyed walking ever-increasing distances to gather firewood and therefore wanted to deplete the wood reserves around their villages, or as though farmers in the least developed countries were perversely disinclined to plant trees. In fact, however, that was hardly surprising considering that tree-planting time could also be used for planting food crops thus meeting more urgent needs. And why should the herdsman rein in his cattle, sole source of his daily income, for the sake of some distant global campaign against desertification?

58. The answer was very simple. Those who caused desertification did so largely without malice aforethought. If offered alternative ways of interacting productively with the land and water around them, they too would become advocates of environmental protection. In trying to arrive at such alternatives over the past decade, too little attention had been paid to the socio-economic forces operating at the local level in the least developed countries. For example, it had been thought that techniques for range-control could be transferred from Texas to Mali, or that industrial tree-planting technology could be imitated. The results had been negative. It was now known that project designers had to consult farmers and herdsmen in developing effective anti-desertification schemes because such schemes had a direct impact on the daily lives of millions of people. Campaigns based on edict or repressive tactics would lead nowhere. A concerted effort was required.

59. Without firm support from national public authorities, the struggle against desertification was doomed to failure. But that was not enough. There had to be a harmonious integration of efforts at the ministerial level. Furthermore, national policies for dealing with the distribution and use of ground and surface water would reduce conflicts among various categories of users. Governments should therefore create a suitable framework of laws and regulations for the management of their nations' natural resources.

60. Such efforts could and should be encouraged by outside technical and financial assistance. As the IBRD had pointed out, donors and international agencies could play a useful role by compiling resource data, organizing land-use planning units, promoting exchanges of experience among tropical countries and developing new methods of soil conservation. External assistance was also needed to finance the necessary research to improve the yields of indigenous trees and ensure a more important place for forestry in training curricula.

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(Mr. Kelly, United States)

61. In stressing the importance of local initiatives, his delegation did not mean to minimize that of such institutions as UNEP, which could play key roles in helping to co-ordinate research programmes, devising state-of-the-art assessments and channelling "lessons learned" to decision-makers and managers. His Government was pleased by UNEP's concentration of its scarce resources on a core set of programme priorities over the past year. That concentration, together with UNEP's restructuring of its institutional responsibilities for promoting the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, augured well for its future.

62. The international community was faced with the threat of desertification. Given the phenomenon's destructive and intractable nature, there was real reason for gloom. Only genuine collaboration among all countries would succeed in halting desertification. His Government had played and would continue to play a determined role in such collaboration.

63. Mr. AL-GHAMDY (Saudi Arabia) said that the Executive Director of UNEP had given a realistic description of the phenomenon of desertification, which affected almost 20 per cent of the world's population and called for rapid action, particularly in Africa where its consequences for the economies of the affected countries were disastrous. Since the holding of the United Nations Conference on Desertification in 1977 and the adoption of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, the number of direct victims of that scourge had steadily increased. The objective of halting desertification by the year 2000 no longer seemed attainable; thus far, success had been achieved only in creating an awareness of the phenomenon's seriousness and of the need to eliminate it.

64. The objectives set by the Dakar Conference in July 1984 were consistent with the recommendations made by the UNEP Governing Council at its twelfth session. The Dakar Conference, in which the African countries stricken by desertification and drought had participated, had confirmed those countries' political will to adopt all necessary measures in order to remedy the situation and to elaborate, at the national level, strategies focused on awareness of the desertification phenomenon; protection of vegetation, the need to make the best use of all water resources; food security; energy; and the conservation of common ecosystems in the affected areas. The Conference had also stressed the need for technical and financial co-operation at the national, regional and international levels.

65. The fight against desertification was an important factor which would help to eliminate famine and poverty and ensure the well-being of peoples in Africa and elsewhere. His country, which was well acquainted with the phenomenon, was actively engaged in fighting its effects, whether within a bilateral framework, within the Arab and Islamic world, or at the international level. In particular, it had granted generous aid to the Islamic Committee of Solidarity with Sahelian Countries to enable it to sink wells, carry out studies and apply measures of all kinds aimed at promoting the struggle against desertification.

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66. Mr. HASSAN (Sudan) said that, although the Secretary-General's untiring efforts to sensitize the international community to the crisis situation affecting food and agriculture in Africa did not seem to have met with immediate response, the Sudan and other African countries had done their best to support those efforts, inter alia by elaborating, at the tenth meeting of the Conference of Ministers of the Economic Commission for Africa, short-, medium- and long-term measures for dealing with the crisis. It might have been hoped that the essential preventive measures would have been taken. In fact, however, it had to be recognized that the international community's reaction had been negative and that the arguments heard over and over again in international forums failed to reflect the concern which the plight of Africa should arouse. The African countries should, of course, initiate national strategies that could lead them towards self-reliance in food supply. However, local financial resources were inadequate for implementing such strategies. Assistance from the international community was crucial and indispensable, and the level of such assistance scale should be commensurate with the seriousness of the crisis.

67. The example of his own country illustrated the point. In the Sudan (whose capital, Khartoum, had 20 years previously been in the heart of the savannah belt), successive years of meagre rainfall and increasing drought had been crowned in 1984 by a rainy season in which not a single drop of rain fell, and the desert was advancing remorselessly. Well before the convening of the United Nations Conference on Desertification and even before the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, the Sudanese Government had established a national institution to deal with the problem of desertification. At the time, practical and scientifically verifiable programmes involving modest costs to the international community had been formulated. In 1983, the participants in an international gathering organized in the Sudan under the chairmanship of Leopold Senghor had issued "the call of Khartoum on desertification", which urged the international community to live up to its moral obligation to help improve the situation in Africa. But programmes aimed at combating desertification and increasing preparedness for sudden and unpredictable onslaughts of drought had been labelled too ambitious.

68. It had been argued at the time that the "absorptive capacity" of the Sudan was insufficient. The same argument had been repeated subsequently, both at the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development and in the consultative group and round-table meetings on implementation of the Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s for the Least Developed Countries. For the Sudan, that coined phrase was no more than a reflection of the lack of political will to implement the steps enumerated in various plans of action or to honour specific commitments made to help develop the least endowed countries of the third world. The absorptive capacity of a country was a function of its indigenous technological capacity. That capacity could only be increased by a steady and predictable flow of resources to sustain long-term development plans which drew to the utmost extent possible on available national expertise and which phased projects so as to ensure their implementation by the authorities. Constantly harping on the developing countries' lack of absorptive capacity whenever development aid was requested served only to tighten the vicious circle already

(Mr. Hassan, Sudan)

strangling development and to perpetuate the injustices of the current international economic order.

69. Self-reliance was a prime objective for developing countries, but the Sudan remained firmly convinced that international co-operation must complement national efforts. That was the view taken at the Second National Economic Conference held at Khartoum in January 1984, which had declared the following objectives: self-reliance, integration and proper deployment of foreign aid in medium-term and long-term development plans.

70. International co-operation had played and could still play a considerable part in helping the Sudanese Government and people to face the steady flow of refugees, both foreign and Sudanese, since drought had forced hundreds of thousands of inhabitants to abandon the north-west of the country. Food aid was being impeded by economic conditions and political and legislative constraints. However, the Sudanese Government was sure that those obstacles could be overcome to a great extent if the news media in the developed countries described the current African crisis realistically, emphasizing its humanitarian aspects. Such considerations did not prevent the Sudan from appreciating the help received from the international community and the United Nations system at its true value. It hoped that the current session of the General Assembly would increase the international community's awareness of the problem of desertification and would mobilize the international aid and co-operation needed to confront the problem.

71. Mr. SMITH (Jamaica) said he hoped that the inclusion of item 141 in the Committee's agenda would encourage a renewed effort by the international community to combat desertification. The environmental and human tragedy being played out in many countries, particularly in Africa, was a direct consequence of the lack of will to act more vigorously to counter the scourge following the United Nations Conference on Desertification in 1977. Drought and desertification, which were bringing starvation and suffering to millions on the continent of Africa, were international problems. The tragic situation was reflected in a substantial decline in agricultural output, the decimation of livestock, chronic food deficits, shortfalls in export earnings and perpetual recourse to borrowing.

72. His delegation wished to express its solidarity with the stricken countries and urged the international community to mobilize increased technical and financial resources to provide them with the necessary support in the medium and long term. In that connection, it should be recalled that the Nairobi Plan of Action contained 28 recommendations for combating desertification and called for specific measures to mobilize the resources necessary for their implementation. It would perhaps be useful to establish an international financial corporation to provide funds for activities aimed at halting the advance of the desert.

73. In view of the seriousness and extent of the problem, the international community should provide the resources necessary to halt and roll back the process of desertification, because the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin

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(Mr. Smith, Jamaica)

America and the Caribbean could not indefinitely sustain the persistent erosion of the land which constituted their main wealth. In that connection, agencies such as UNEP and UNDP should be congratulated on their efforts in the battle against desertification and for the solution of related environmental problems. It was encouraging to note that Governments were increasingly recognizing the need to give priority to the problem of desertification, which required concerted policy action at all levels.

74. Mr. OULD SID'AHMED VALL (Mauritania) said that the drought had been an unprecedented catastrophe for his country. As a result of the inexorable advance of the desert, pasture had been destroyed, cultivated areas were shrinking and livestock, formerly an abundant reservoir which supplied the whole region, had been reduced by more than 70 per cent and was threatened with extinction. His country had therefore taken an active part in the Ministerial Conference for a joint policy to combat desertification in the CILSS, ECOWAS and Maghreb countries and in Egypt and the Sudan. Like the other members of CILSS, his country, which had been severely hit by the world economic crisis, had for more than 16 years been experiencing a drought which had disorganized the nation's life and impeded implementation of its development plans. Whole populations reduced to complete destitution had invaded urban centres in a massive exodus from the countryside. As a result of the irregularity of rainfall and its poor geographical distribution, cereal production had registered deficits which in some years had reached the appalling level of 90 per cent.

75. In order to cope with the tragic situation, his country had mobilized its limited means in an attempt to assist the stricken populations, solve the problems caused by the rural exodus and halt the desert's advance by a policy of reforestation, protection of vegetation and fixation of the dunes. All social strata had made their contribution to the effort aimed at alleviating the sufferings of the populations most affected.

76. The help given by friendly countries and by international and non-governmental organizations, even if insufficient, had been a valuable addition to the efforts made at national and regional levels. Thus it was to be hoped that the heightened awareness resulting from the consideration of the problems of drought and desertification would inspire a surge of solidarity to match the serious problems created by those two scourges. The search for lasting solutions required the mobilization of financial resources which were beyond the possibilities of the countries in the region engaged in fighting the famine, saving livestock and protecting their crops.

77. Mr. BENMOUSSA (Morocco) said that drought and desertification had assumed apocalyptic dimensions on the African continent, especially in the Sudano-Sahelian region, as well as in western, eastern, and southern Africa. Conferences organized over the past few years to study the problem had alerted the international community to the seriousness of the situation. However, awareness alone was not sufficient; it must be followed by urgent and co-ordinated action. The deterioration of climatic conditions in Africa had had disastrous consequences: 150 million Africans suffered from hunger and malnutrition and in many regions,

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(Mr. Benmoussa, Morocco)

human activity had become a desperate struggle for sheer survival amidst total deprivation and desperation.

78. Yet, the past few years had witnessed a lessening of aid to the African continent and a considerable reduction in private capital flows, because the main donors were said to be disappointed by the fact that most African countries had not adopted policies aimed at promoting their own development. Those donors forgot that the Harare Declaration had defined the policies to be implemented for overcoming the food crisis and that the Lagos Plan of Action recognized that the responsibility for development lay primarily with the African countries. Above all, they forgot that in spite of vigorous reforms undertaken by those countries, most of the problems associated with drought and desertification had negative effects which acted cumulatively upon one another. Thus, the inexorable advance of the desert dried up the watercourses, degraded the soil, diminished the area available for cultivation, caused serious harvest and cattle losses, and forced affected human and livestock populations to flee, which led to the over-utilization of the remaining watercourses, the destruction of pastures which had been spared, and the over-exploitation of cultivated areas. Similarly, irregular or insufficient rainfall had grave implications for irrigation, stock-raising and consumption. In addition, the drop in the level of agricultural activity dangerously reduced the tax receipts of States while the massive and uncontrolled movement of rural populations towards the cities was a burden on the budgets of local communities, led to mushrooming urbanization, exacerbated the unemployment problem, gave rise to social discord and necessitated further drains on capital expenditure and development budgets.

79. However, notwithstanding their complexity and their tragic consequences, those problems could be resolved through the pooling of national resources and through international solidarity. As the World Food Council had stressed, the difficulty of feeding an expanding world population was due, not to a lack of technical ability to produce sufficient food for all, but to political, economic and institutional constraints which were obstructing a more equitable distribution of the world's resources and riches.

80. Morocco had itself been stricken by drought and desertification. During the past four years, rainfall had been low and irregularly distributed, which had led during the most recent agricultural season to a considerable reduction in the livestock population, a serious shortfall in cereal production, a decline of agricultural revenue and a massive exodus from rural to urban areas. To meet the situation, the Moroccan Government had implemented a livestock preservation programme, had created new jobs in the affected provinces, had encouraged the economical use of water and energy, had raised producer prices for agricultural products and had removed the agricultural tax until the year 2000. Morocco was ready to share with the most disadvantaged countries of sub-Saharan Africa the experience it had gained combating drought and desertification, in accordance with the spirit of the Conference held at Dakar in 1984.

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(Mr. Benmoussa, Morocco)

81. Drought and desertification, and the resulting food problems, were merely the more visible part of the profound crisis which the African continent was undergoing. Notwithstanding its immense natural and human riches, Africa was the least developed and the least industrialized of the continents. It had the highest number of refugees and displaced persons in the world, one of the lowest levels of literacy and training and the most rudimentary infrastructure in the areas of health and housing, as was apparent from a study published in 1983 by the United Nations Development Programme.

82. It was thus easy, when those brutal realities were overlooked or poorly grasped, to put the blame on the African continent. In fact, sub-Saharan Africa showed all the symptoms of growing isolation as far as economic life and international co-operation were concerned. That isolation would be further accentuated during the current decade unless large-scale structural action was taken at the international level.

83. That was why it was urgent during the current session to pay particular attention to Africa, in order to reverse the process whereby that continent was becoming more and more distanced from the world economic process. That trend, which meant that Africa was playing an ever-diminishing role in the world economy, suggested that the pernicious process of desertification was unexpectedly invading the area of human solidarity. It was thus essential to prevent the climatic drought from translating into an unjustifiable drought of the heart. Africa was already suffering from an unspeakable evil called apartheid, the political apartheid rampant in the south of the continent. It would be intolerable if Africa had to endure in the near future an economic apartheid of continental dimensions.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.