

STATEMENT BY MR. N. K. SINGH, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, ON AGENDA ITEM 19 –
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AT THE SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE 66TH SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 01, 2011

Mr. Chairman,

Let me begin by associating myself with the statement made by the Argentinean delegation on behalf of the G-77.



There is a general consensus that poverty eradication and vulnerability of the poor in difficult times have a symbiotic relationship with issues of environment in multiple ways. The core of the UN strategy of Millennium Development Goals relates to poverty reduction. No environmental arrangement is credible without action in respect of food security, energy and water access, garnering and renewing of natural resources and combating the multiple challenges of rapid urbanization. As of yesterday, we have become 7 billion in the planet.

The centrality of Rio principles and the Agenda 21 are widely accepted. There is also little dispute that notwithstanding methodological and definitional ambiguities the broader principles of common but differentiated responsibility and equity must remain the overarching framework for any environmental inter-governmental arrangements.

Regrettably and with some disappointment, we must recognize that global attention on sustainable development and environment has suddenly waned. Focus has shifted on global financial meltdown, rising unemployment, mitigating the debt burden and ensuring the orderly recovery of both United States and Europe. Environmental concerns are suddenly out of fashion. Media reporting and activities of spirited NGOs have been superseded by other overriding developments.

So what can we do to re-focus on the future of the planet, and on the future of mankind? Time is ticking. Every major episode only reiterates the validity of the overwhelming scientific evidence and the urgency of assigning the highest priority to environment. We recognize that many of these are areas embedded in the Cancun Agreement, not only in the Green Fund, the Technology Mechanism and the Adaptation Framework but which will encompass four critical areas - areas of mitigation, adaptation, finance and technology. Within this of course, the special problems of Small Island Developing States and consequences of desertification and land degradation contained in the UN Convention on Combating Desertification must receive priority.

Let me say a word on each of these four pillars. Clearly on mitigation, we must engage on new cropping patterns which can withstand changes in temperature. Food shortages arising out of changes in weather patterns, uncertainty of rainfall and unseasonal changes in temperature behavior are matters of concern. These have huge implications for livelihood patterns and pastoral habits, and thereby impacting our development initiatives and war on poverty.

Of course, issues of food security are linked not only to the size of the population but also to research and development in higher yielding and more resistant varieties of crops, orderly global trade, credible distribution arrangement and a more rational distribution of food stocks between countries, regions and population, which is fair and equitable. It is intolerable if in parts of the world there is huge wastage while many countries struggle to improve their outcomes in the global hunger index.

Adapting to changes may require dislocation of habitats and re-engineering of economic activity, seeking more expensive renewable sources of energy to lower carbon intensity, moving away from fossil fuel dependence but in manner that recognizes the huge divergences in carbon footprints between countries and regions.

How does one finance such large investments? Should there be a carbon tax which is universal and a model which nations can replicate? Should this differentially penalise those when deviations are sharper and of a graduated scale, and how could availability of finance recognize the huge differences of levels of development and the degree of concessionality this might need.

Access to technology must be guaranteed at costs which are affordable and apart from incentivizing research and development to suit local conditions, address the need to applying Intellectual Property Rights regimes in a manner which while giving appropriate returns to the originator of technology makes it possible and affordable for wider application of given global multiplier effects.

All this needs to be bound together in a holistic, integrated broad framework and the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil next year is a huge opportunity to do so. Given the complexities, a grand arrangement may or may not be practical. Incremental changes must be fostered where feasible because the best must never become the enemy of the good. The main thing we must do and convey to the General Assembly is to reposition sustainable development and environment as global priorities and bring them back in focus.

There is no getting away even within developing countries the capacity of some large developing countries like India to take on a larger responsibility that may be fair and rational. The Indian Government in Parliament has already outlined a credible action plan on Climate Change and global warming and is committed to according resources to implement a multifaceted programme as part of its 12th five year plan. We will not shirk to do what we believe is fair and reasonable even while we remain cognizant that even today our carbon footprint of about 1 ton per capita is 1/7th of the global average.

India has introduced three new items for COP agenda at Durban. These include equitable access to sustainable development, unilateral trade measures and technology related Intellectual Property Rights. These three are crucial from the point of developing countries and moreover are fundamental issues under the Convention that underpin the working of the global Climate Change regime.

Equitable access to sustainable development takes within its fold an approach premised on an understanding of the atmosphere as a global common to which all nations must have equitable access. Given the growing number of unilateral trade and other measures to be imposed on developing countries – from border carbon adjustment measures to taxes- in the name of climate protection, India believes that any agreed outcome on climate change must contain a firm and unambiguous commitment from developed countries that they will not resort to unilateral trade measures. While we are flexible in how these are to be treated, we look forward to engaging on them in Durban.

Cyclical economic behavior is by definition transitional. The need for Sustainable Development is abiding. It is central to the security of our life, our planet and our future generations. It would be a huge mistake to brush them under the carpet just because we suddenly have to do other things, which may no doubt be important in their own way. India looks forward to acting in close concert with the G-77, with regional

arrangements and other member countries to regenerate public awareness and campaign for the primacy of sustainable development and environmental issues.

I thank you.

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