

Agenda Item 95 (b) to (f): Environment and Sustainable Development

Statement by Hon'ble Mrs. Krishna Bose, MP,

Chairperson, Standing Committee on External Affairs,

on October 19, 2000

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, my delegation wishes to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the Group of 77. We have read with interest the reports of the Secretary General on Agenda Item 95, sub-agenda items 95 (b) to (f).

Convention on Bio-diversity

The conservation of biodiversity is vital for the survival of the planet, being important for the maintenance of life sustaining systems of the biosphere. The 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity was a significant step forward as it reflected the commitment of the global community towards the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. While re-affirming the sovereign right of a nation over its biodiversity, the Convention visualized a fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of generic resources with the country of origin. My country, India is one of the 12 mega biodiversity countries of the world. After becoming a party to the Convention of Biodiversity in 1994, we have taken a series of steps to strengthen strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of Biodiversity. In January this year, we adopted a National Policy and Action Strategy on Biodiversity after consultation with all stakeholders, with the aim to provide a framework for preparing detailed action programmes at the micro-level on sustainable use of biodiversity.

In the context of the Convention on Bio-diversity, we believe that one of the issues that needs to be urgently addressed relates to the development of proprietary patents based on traditional knowledge of indigenous communities, without obtaining the prior informed consent of the developing countries concerned and without coming to any agreement on benefit sharing with these developing countries. There is a clear and pressing need to extend effective protection to knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous communities, developed over the millennia, to ensure a flowback of benefits from patentees to original developers.

India participated in the negotiations at Montreal in January this year, where the Protocol on Bio-safety was adopted. We hope that the protocol will enable State Parties to protect their biodiversity and benefit from the advances in biotechnologies, while ensuring the safety aspects of any import, storage and transport of LMOs/GMO including for purposes of scientific research. We are in the process of completing domestic procedures for signing the Protocol.

UN Convention to Combat Desertification

India attaches great importance to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and was among the early signatories to this Convention. While it is a matter of gratification that over 167 States have now acceded to the Convention, we remain concerned about the major financial constraints that hamper effective implementation of the Convention. We call upon the international community to make available requisite financial resources. It is our hope the Global Mechanism will focus on modalities for more effective mobilisation of financial resources to further the Convention's objectives.

Water supply and Sanitation.

India recognizes that water is a prime natural resource, a basic human need and a precious national asset. It is our view that the planning and development of water resources should be governed by national perspective. In 1987, India adopted a National Water Policy which stipulates that the water allocation priorities should broadly be drinking water, irrigation, hydro-power, navigation and Industrial and other uses. The priorities are in accordance with the requirements of the country and are implemented as so to further the objective of the sustainable use of water resources.

Renewable Sources of Energy and the World Solar Programme

The world community today uses up in one minute what it took the earth a millennium to create. It is estimated that at this rate, well before the end of the new born millennium, we will run out of conventional sources of energy. If the current interest in renewable energy can be effectively converted into concrete projects to tap its enormous potential, the 21st century can be reasonably expected to be as profoundly shaped by the moves away from fossil fuels, as the 20th century was by the moves towards them. Renewable energy, which appeared to be no more than a bright idea 100 years ago, may remain the only solution 100 years later.

India is one of the few countries to have initiated research and development with a view to harnessing new and renewable energy sources. Significant progress has been achieved through National Programmes in different areas of renewable energy sector. Public awareness about the benefits of renewable energy has been consciously promoted to promote greater acceptability of renewable energy devices and systems. Till December last, the contribution of renewable energy to the total power generation capacity of the country at 1600 Mega Watts (MW) represented a little over 1.5% of the total installed generating capacity. We hope that by the year 2012, nearly 10% of the total installed power generating capacity in the country would be based on renewables.

Renewable energy, especially solar photo voltaic and solar thermal power, as well as utilisation of bio-mass, is increasingly being used in India, particularly in rural areas. We estimate that solar lighting and water pumping system are now being used in around 300,000 homes in India. Eleven regions of the country have been identified as high focus areas of the solar photo voltaic programme (SVP). Expanding use of solar energy by the Indian public is not surprising. India is one of the six countries which have developed the technology for the manufacture of polysilicon material, accounting for nearly 8% of the world production.

In the spirit of South-South cooperation, India has always been willing to share its development experience and expertise with other nations. It is the coordinator of Solar Energy Applications Project of the Group of 15 developing nations and has been promoting increased use of new and renewable sources of energy through its technical and economic cooperation programme.

Small Island Developing States

India had actively participated in the 22nd Special Session of the General Assembly as also at the Global Conference on sustainable development of small island developing States held in Barbados in 1994. As a country with a long coastline, and with over 5000 islands, India has traditionally attached the highest importance to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, and to the outcome of the 22nd Special Session.

With a large number of islands, we in India have some experience of the problems faced by small islands supporting small isolated communities. Our approach to sustainable development of these islands has involved programmes for maintenance, regeneration and restoration of the eco- system. The objective is to restore the productive potential, provide employment to local communities and at the same time, maintain and promote ecological balance. We have found decentralisation and full involvement of the local communities as the most effective way of sustaining this process.

We have, as a follow-up to the 22nd Special Session, decided to devote a major part of our technical cooperation programmes to small island developing States. We have also instituted and created special programmes to cater for capacity building of other developing countries for fuller implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

It is clear that small island developing States have special problems and needs, embody a unique combination of vulnerability, ecological fragility, natural disaster and turbulence in the international economic environment. The small size of their populations, reserve base, market, relative diversions, isolation and differences in geographical characteristics, hinder their ability to embark on self-sustaining development.