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**STATEMENT
BY**

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**ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE
OPEN WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

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Mr President,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by Fiji, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China; Chad on behalf of the African Group and Zimbabwe on behalf of the Southern African region.

South Africa views Sustainable Development as a conceptual framework for development that recognizes the interdependencies between economic growth, social equity and environmental integrity. South Africa's approach emphasizes the need for a long-term planning horizon, and the adoption of a development path that addresses poverty eradication, inequality and the unemployment of current generations, while leaving future generations with at least the same capacity and options for development.

Global efforts towards poverty eradication must remain the top priority of the international community. Any debate on the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should therefore:

- ensure that all previous international agreements are honoured, particularly in fulfilling obligations on the Means of Implementation;
- address inequality in all areas; and
- address social and economic development as well as environmental protection in a balanced manner.

It has always been our view that the formulation of SDGs should not distract from the attainment or financing of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the remaining period prior to 2015. The MDGs provide a very clear way to measure progress for the poorest, and there has been very significant progress on all the key MDGs in countries across the globe. Accordingly, the debate on SDG's should be firmly contextualized within the MDG debate, as well as all other internationally agreed development goals (IAGDs).

The MDGs are a time-bound, limited set of critical priorities, with concrete targets, that require global cooperation and can be measured through clear interventions. Their simplicity and clarity have resonated with citizens in many regions around in the world, making them an effective framework for rallying accountability for their achievement. The MDGs are "ends" rather than "means", and, as such, are not an all-encompassing blueprint for everything that constitutes the complex and multi-disciplinary imperative of development. It is in this context that we argue that they provide a framework of key priorities for Member States and the UN System to collectively act together. As we engage in this process of formulating the SDGs these and other critical attributes and principles should be carefully preserved for any future framework.

However, drawing from the lessons learned, it may also be important not to shy away from critically examining the purpose of agreeing to goals in the first place and to interrogate whether time-bound goals, measures and targets are the right tools to tackle all of the development challenges we face today.

Co-facilitators,

The OWG has an opportunity, guided by the development effectiveness principles, to work to help strengthen human and institutional capabilities for Sustainable Development, to eradicate poverty. In this regard, the SDGs need to address the root causes of poverty and the policy spaces that impact on poverty, underdevelopment and the historic marginalisation of Africa and the South.

We wish to add that, in this process, alignment with regional priorities would be essential. In the African context, for example, the SDGs would need to be aligned with, and enhance, existing continent-wide programmes and initiatives, such as NEPAD, whose initiatives are aligned to the MDGs and remain relevant in many sectors. It is pleasing to learn that many of the various different thematic areas that have been proposed for the SDGs, in various forums, correspond with existing initiatives on the continent.

We fully support calls for the SDGs to be anchored on the outcomes of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation as well as outcomes of all UN major Summits in the economic, social and environmental fields.

South Africa looks forward to engaging in the inter-governmental process and pledges its support to the work of the OWG. We remain firmly committed to our collective efforts to identify key priority areas in a coherent and appropriate framework that needs to inform the development architecture beyond 2015, including the SDGs.

Thank you.