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**INTERGOVERNMENTAL PREPARATORY MEETING
FOR THE SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT (CSD 17)**

**STATEMENT AT THE OPENING SEGMENT
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR PAUL BADJI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF SENEGAL TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN GROUP

New York, 23rd February 2009

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Chairperson,

On behalf of the African Group, I wish to congratulate you and the bureau for your leadership in organizing this important intergovernmental meeting for CSD 17. We also wish to align ourselves to the Statement made by Republic of Sudan on behalf of the G77 and China.

Chairperson,

CSD 17 is being hosted at a time when the challenges facing the world as identified by the report of the Secretary General are real. Let us recall that at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the international community committed itself to support Africa in meeting its mounting challenges. The international community was once again reminded on their commitments in September 2008 during Africa's development needs which culminated into a political declaration.

According to the latest ECA Report on Sustainable Developing in Africa, it is stated that apart from being the poorest region in the world, Africa remains the least developed continent. This is the greatest challenge facing Africa's sustainable development. It is even more challenging that Africa is not on track to meet of the MDGs by 2015.

The situation is further exacerbated by the unfolding global financial and food crisis thus further threatening the development prospects of Africa. Furthermore, the crisis is threatening to reverse the modest socio-economic gains made by African countries over the past few decades. It is therefore highly imperative that Africa be fully involved in the search for durable solution and as such needs to be adequately represented in all subsequent multilateral platforms.

Chairperson,

As we are already aware, Africa faces a number of serious challenges, including poverty, hunger, climate change, land degradation and desertification, rapid urbanization, lack of adequate water supplies and energy supply and HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other endemic diseases. African countries have taken the leadership to addressing sustainable development challenges and charting the way forward for the region at national, regional and continental level. The New partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and other efforts, which the international community pledged to support, offers a framework for accelerating progress on the continent in sustainable development.

NEPAD has, in spite of its limited resources, contributed to African countries' efforts to improve infrastructure and institutional capacity in a number of areas, including agriculture, rural development, and environment.

However, it goes without saying that the solutions to sustainable development challenges in Africa lie in re- invigorating the commitment of the international community to address the implementation of Agenda 21 in the Continent.

Chairperson,

As we engage in the CSD 17, strong economic performance in Africa in recent years is an evidence of the creation of a conducive environment for sustainable development.

It is worth noting that, unlike other developing regions of the world; the level and nature of economic growth, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa have not yet yielded significant reduction in the proportion of people living below the poverty line. Overall, average GDP growth remains below the 7-percent minimum annual target rate, and the modest growth is mostly associated with sectors with little impact on employment and income for the majority. Yet we know that at least two-thirds of the increasing numbers of poor Africans live in rural areas, where their livelihoods depend directly or indirectly on agriculture-related activities, a sector with proven great potential for lifting scores of people out of poverty. This fact strongly underscores the need for a substantial and sustainable transformation of the African rural economies.

Chairperson,

Africa depends on agriculture and thus needs diversification to transform agriculture and the rural economy. To succeed, this will requires a shift from subsistence-oriented production systems towards medium and large scale production. This would require financial support for improved agricultural infrastructure.

Land and natural resources provide the source for a significant share of GDP, national food needs, employment, and export revenue and therefore key assets for economic growth and development in Africa. Therefore, agriculture, natural resource use, and land-based activities are crucial for income generation and employment for the majority of Africans.

Paradoxically, **Chairperson**, the most vulnerable members of the African society, namely women, who comprise more than 50% of Africa's population and bear the brunt of harnessing lands, while also being the "keepers of the environment", do not own or control land and natural resources.

It is therefore important to ensure that necessary land policy reforms are accompanied by the appropriate mechanisms that guarantee women's full rights to land.

Chairperson

Drought and desertification continue to threaten the livelihoods of millions of people in Africa, increasingly making them unable to edge out of poverty. This trend is worsening with the onset of climate change, to which many countries in the region are most vulnerable. Consequently, drought and desertification merit urgent attention in policies and actions at national, regional and global levels.

In the area of international trade, Africa continues to face obstacles to market access and supply side constraints. While we welcome the recent Aid-for-Trade initiative as a step in the right direction, we also call for its expeditious operationalization as well as for the urgent restart of the stalled Doha Development Round negotiations.

It is also time to find a lasting solution to the problem of multilateral and bilateral debt, including in those countries outside the Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPC). We must renew and strengthen efforts to make the debt-relief initiative more inclusive.

Chairperson,

Progress on systemic issues has been limited. In spite of persistent calls, African countries still do not have fair representation in the decision-making organs of international institutions. The recently established G20 platform on financial crisis is a case in point. There remains a serious democracy and governance deficit in these institutions whose decisions directly affect African countries and the lives of their peoples.

The effective representation of Africa in these institutions will ensure that they are more accountable and responsive to the needs and concerns of African countries. In this regard, we welcome the recent decision to create an additional seat for Sub-Saharan Africa on the Board of the World Bank as well as the recognition of the veracity for increased support for Africa's Development needs in the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development.

I thank you.