



THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

THIRD SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OPEN WORKING GROUP ON
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Check against delivery

S T A T E M E N T

by

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Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to make this statement on behalf of Serbia and Belarus, two countries that share the membership in this Open Working Group.

We have gathered here to renew our political commitment on sustainable development, our ultimate goal, and green economy, our tool to achieve it. The indications that our Planet will be home to more than 9 billion people by the year 2050 give us cause to believe that the resource-intensive growth of the twentieth century cannot be continued nor afforded.

We need to make an advanced green and sustainable shift in the way we produce and consume. To that end, it is important to develop a set of visionary, post-2015 goals that can increase the potential for a true change towards sustainable development and ensure continuity of the Millennium Development Goals. This is true, in particular, of the crucial issues of water safety and availability, provision of water related services, such as water supply and sanitation, drought, land degradation and desertification. Resolving problems in these areas and ensuring sustainable agriculture and food security is even more important if we take into account the effects of climate change.

Our deliberations on water and agriculture should also establish a clear vision of how the achievement of the relevant goals will be supported by the technical assistance, including provision of an access to modern technologies for developing states, middle-income countries and countries with economies in transition.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Inadequate climate conditions, i.e. increase in temperature, decrease in precipitation and other changes in the climate system have many negative consequences in sectors and systems of food production, agriculture and water resources in many countries of the world.

A preliminary analysis of climate change impacts on sectors in this area shows that increases in drought frequency and intensity in the past two decades have caused great damage to agriculture. According to the evaluation of drought impacts on the crop yield, the average drop was 40.9 per cent compared to the average annual yield in the years without drought. The change also accounted for an increase in crop and vegetable diseases and, bearing in mind the projected rise in air temperature and the decrease in precipitation, there is no doubt that agricultural production will be vulnerable to the negative impacts of the change. The assessments obtained from crop production models show that the drop in yield for some crops in the second half of this century amounted to up to 10 per cent. The significance of the data should be viewed against the backdrop of

the fact that agriculture is traditionally one of the key sectors that contribute to the economic development and meet the biggest part of food needs in most countries around the world, including Serbia. We therefore believe that the SDGs should set targets that will ensure future urgent actions in this field.

The projections on the organic land area indicate that production, especially certain types of production, and yield could increase if the land is managed in an ecologically sound manner. Food security and nutrition are pressing global challenges and we should reaffirm our commitment to enhancing food security and access to adequate, safe and nutritious food for present and future generations. There is a clear need to revitalize the agricultural and rural development sectors in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable fashion.

The SDGs should define targets for enhancing access to markets by agricultural producers, in particular by small-scale farmers, women, indigenous peoples and vulnerable social groups. Incentives should be introduced in order to support sustainable agricultural production, such as commercial credits and other financial assistance, land tenure, health care, social services, education, training, knowledge and appropriate and affordable technologies, including for efficient irrigation, re-use of treated waste water and water harvesting and storage. Innovative measures should be developed to secure sustainability of land use and agricultural production, including investment in research and development of sustainable agricultural technologies, improvement of market and trading systems functioning and the strengthening of international cooperation. Governments should provide supporting regulatory frameworks for joint public and private investment in sustainable agriculture, land management and rural development. Only if these tangible and measurable goals are defined to correlate with the previous achievements of the MDGs may we expect to see improvements in food security and the eradication of hunger and conserve, at the same time, land and water resources, as well as biodiversity and ecosystems and their services. The combination of policy and technological advancements should bring about enhanced resilience to climate change and natural disasters in all sectors, in particular in life supporting sectors such as water management and agricultural production.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Let me present the view of the two countries on whose behalf I have the honour to speak today on the issue of water and sanitation. As highlighted in the objectives of the policy for the long-term sustainable use of water resources, the development of the water sector should create positive effects on overall economic development, mitigate social problems in specific areas and at the country level in general and protect and improve the environment, particularly water resources. Increasing the volume of investment and building public-private partnerships in the water sector, which would enable the annual turnover to grow, would enable the generation of new jobs and provide additional income to the population and create new revenue, as well as improve the use of water resources.

Without regulating the water regime (surface, subterranean water and ground moisture), we cannot expect to achieve high and stable agricultural production. Illustrative in this regard, i.e. in regard of the supply of water to the population, is the ratio of economic losses due to treatment (not including deaths) v. the necessary investment in population water supply and settlements sanitization. The provision of clean water and the sanitization of settlements are, according to the ideal (maximum) variant, two times cheaper than the treatment of people because of the failure to address these issues. These issues, however, should be addressed carefully: we must not allow that our water needs today endanger the needs of the generations tomorrow and must see to it that we use our waters in the way in which we protect, long-term, their available resources at the same time.

The SDG on waters are essential and should reflect, in an integrated way, the aspects of access to water and sanitation, water resources management, trans-boundary water cooperation, waste water management and water quality, in line with the issues and priorities identified by the thematic international consultations on water. They could also emphasize the importance of multilateral and basin-wide legal frameworks and institutions for trans-boundary water cooperation, as these are fundamental to achieve cooperation in sustainable management of water resources. The emphasis on cooperation between States in the management and protection of shared waters would be important in particular in the context of the opening of the Water Convention for accession by non-UNECE member States expected at the end of 2013. It would also be a proper contribution to the current International Year of Water Cooperation.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

I wish us all fruitful discussion today and a successful work in the months ahead.

Thank you.