



PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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PRESS RELEASE

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(Translation)

Statement by H.E. Mr. WANG Guangtao, Minister of Construction of the People's Republic of China and Head of the Chinese Delegation at the High-level Segment of the thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

(21 April 2005, New York)

Mr. Chairman, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, please allow me, on behalf of the Chinese delegation, to express my congratulations on the convening of the 13th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. I am convinced that under your able leadership and with the close cooperation of all parties, this session will achieve positive results.

Achieving sustainable development is an important and pressing task faced by all the countries in the world. Since the Conference on Environment and Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, all countries have made important strides in coordinating and harmonizing economic development with efforts in the fields of population, resources and the environment and we have witnessed deepening international cooperation in the field of sustainable development. However, at the same time, the degradation of the global environment has shown no signs of reversal. The special difficulties encountered by the developing countries in their economic and social development and their lack of funding and capacities have seriously hampered their efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Water, sanitation and human settlements have a direct bearing on the survival, development and the basic rights of the general population in all countries and they constitute priority areas in sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals. The discussion in this session of future policy options and action plans in connection with these themes is of great relevance.

Mr. Chairman,

By adopting the "Rio Declaration", the "Millennium Declaration", the "Monterrey Consensus" and the "Johannesburg Plan of Implementation", the international community has demonstrated its political will for the promotion of sustainable

development by formulating specific targets and action plans and making a considerable number of commitments. It is now time to fulfill those promises and translate political will into action. I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to present the Chinese government's position as follows:

1. At the national level, governments need to formulate development strategies in line with the specific conditions of their respective countries and adopt an integrated approach that combines economic, legislative and administrative means for the full implementation of those strategies. Governments should also mobilize community participation and establish extensive partnerships.
2. The international community needs to make earnest efforts to create a good external environment for the sustainable development of the developing countries and to alleviate their difficulties in debt, trade and funding and afford them reasonable policy space.
3. The international community, the developed countries in particular, should strive for an early fulfillment of their commitments to provide support and assistance to the developing countries in the areas of funding, technology and capacity building. They should provide new and additional resources to the developing countries and transfer environmentally sound technologies under preferential terms and help them build capacity for sustainable development. The international community needs to establish a mechanism of supervision and promotion for this purpose.
4. All countries have the right to choose their own paths of economic development and environmental protection and exploit their own natural resources in line with the requirements of their economic and social development. However, in this process, they should guard against causing damage to the environment of other countries.
5. In addressing the issues of the global environment, due priority should be given to regional environmental issues, particularly those affecting the developing countries, such as the shortage of water resources, urban air pollution, soil erosion, desertification, natural disasters and ecological damage.

Mr. Chairman, Dear colleagues,

A large population, relative resource poorness and a weak ecological bearing capacity are some of the basic constraints faced by China. The Chinese government highly values the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development and has put forth a people-centered scientific concept of development tailored to China's needs that advocates comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development. The government is committed to building a harmonious society enjoying a decent standard of living by implementing a balanced approach to development: balance between urban and rural development, balance among regions, balance between economic and social development, balance between development and nature and balance between the needs of domestic development and of opening up the economy to the outside world. China has formulated "China Agenda 21" followed by "China's Program of Action for Sustainable Development in the Early 21st Century" to guide China's sustainable development.

In addition, the Chinese government is actively developing a recycling economy. With more efficient resource utilization at the center of its policy and economic restructuring as the main thread, the government has taken actions to improve policy measures, ensure the conservation and rational development and use of resources, promote clean production, raise public awareness in resource conservation, popularize a pattern of production and consumption conducive to energy conservation and pollution reduction, and imbue society with a heightened consciousness of resource conservation and ecological protection.

With regard to water, the Chinese government attaches great importance to water supply, conservation and resource protection. Over the past few years, public water utilities have been developing rapidly. Now, 87% of urban areas in China have access to water supply. In line with its integrated and balanced approach to urban and rural development, the government has increased its - input in rural water supply infrastructure aimed at improving water access for the rural poor, expanding region-based water supply, and providing an urban and rural water supply network system.

Given the shortage and serious pollution of water resources in China, the government, in formulating city development plans and deciding on the location of industries, takes into full account the carrying capacity of water resources and water environment, works hard to develop water-efficient industries and creates a culture of water conservation. At present, 81% of industrial water is recycled. Meanwhile, we have speeded up the implementation of plans for water pollution prevention and clean-up in key river basins and regions, increased investment in this area, put in place a fee-based water discharge and treatment regime, and accelerated the construction of waste water treatment facilities. Over the past three years, the amount of wastewater treated in urban areas has more than doubled.

Committed to the integrated water resources management at the national and river catchment level, we will try to complete a compendium of provincial plans, and formulate an integrated catchment and national plan within one more year.

In the sanitation area, the Chinese government gives the highest priority to people's health and safety. It continues to improve sanitation systems, including government administration, market operations, social participation and contingency planning against unforeseen incidents.

China is a large agriculture-based developing country. The government takes it as a fundamental national policy to establish an urban-rural sanitation security system. The current focus on sanitation development in rural areas is reflected in increased input in rural sanitation infrastructure development. Government accountability is being enhanced; civil society is being mobilized to carry out activities that benefit the public, and the media's role in promoting health education has been put to full use. Local governments at all levels, NGOs, and women and youth organizations take an active part in rural toilet upgrading activities, each playing its unique role in this process. Sanitary toilet coverage in rural China is expected to reach 55% by 2005 and the goal is to achieve the related MDG by 2015.

In recent years, governments at all levels have gradually increased their input in treatment facilities for domestic waste. In 2003, a total of 150 million tons of urban domestic waste was handled with a treatment rate of 50.78%, compared with 2.9% for 1990. This has gone a long way toward improving the urban environment and sanitation as a whole.

In the area of human settlements, the Chinese government pays great attention to housing construction and living environment in the process of urban and rural development, making this sector one of its economic priorities. It has introduced a reform program to commercialize the housing sector, set up a socialized housing security scheme to protect the housing rights and interests of lower-middle income families, improved the functions and quality of buildings, and promoted the construction of energy efficient green buildings. With 524 million people in its cities and towns, urbanization in China has reached 40.5% and has entered a rapid growth period. The rights and interests and housing conditions of residents and those of lower-middle income families in particular have been greatly improved. Per capita housing space is 23.7 M² and 27.7 M² in urban and rural areas respectively.

The Chinese government has also intensified its *efforts* in making and implementing ecological protection plans for the country, its regions, cities, nature reserves and cultural/historic sites in order to pursue an integrated economic and social development for cities and regions alike, and balance the development and utilization of resources with the protection of nature reserves and cultural/historic sites in a bid to improve human settlements in a proactive manner.

The "China Habitat Award" established by the Chinese government in 2000 is intended to commend cities, towns, institutions and individuals for their outstanding contributions to the improvement of urban human settlements, and to give more incentive to local governments for an integrated approach to ecological and environmental protection and management. China's achievements in human settlements have received recognition by the international community, with 12 projects having won the "UN Habitat Award" by the end of 2004.

China is the largest developing country with major environmental interests. We are fully aware of our heavy responsibilities in this regard. China will continue to work unremittingly to live up to its commitments through action, and move firmly along the path to sustainable development. We will, as ever, take an active part in international cooperation on environment and development by working closely with all other countries to protect our shared environment and promote common development with a view to creating a better future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.