

17th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development Remarks by the Rio Group during the opening session

May 4th, 2009

I have the honor to take the floor on behalf of the 23 countries that are part of the Rio Group, namely: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Since this is the first time that our group takes the floor in this session, we express our congratulations to the President of the Commission, Mrs. Gerda Verburg, as well as to the other members of the Bureau for their election, and we offer the support of our Delegations to work constructively during this session.

Madam President,

The seventeenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development is particularly important, because it will address issues that affect directly the opportunities for development of our peoples.

The CSD-17 deals with many topics that are linked with the international environment, characterized by a deep financial and economic crisis, food crisis and climate change, whose consequences pose challenges for the effective exercise of human rights in the immediate future.

Madam President,

Agricultural productivity is a significant component to secure the food of our peoples, and to contribute to the development and growth of our economies.

Our commitment is to guarantee to the poor and vulnerable populations and to the agricultural producers of our countries an equitable rural development. Therefore, we seek that in this session of the Commission we could agree on policies for the achievement of sustainable agriculture.

We express our concern caused by the negative impacts of the market distortions created by the subsidies applied by developed countries to their agricultural production. In this regard, we reiterate that open, transparent and equitable trade conditions and the phase out of subsidies to agricultural production in the developed countries are key conditions to impulse agriculture, sustainable development, poverty eradication and protection of our natural resources.

The issue of food security and, particularly, the crisis caused by the volatility in food prices, is a serious concern for the Rio Group countries, particularly by the challenges posed for development, as well as for exercising the right to food.

In this context, we express our support for the works of the FAO, the World Food Programme, and IFAD.

Madam President,

For us, it is imperative to reverse the current levels of degradation of soil, which affects large areas of the region and jeopardize the food security and poverty eradication.

Drought is a serious obstacle to the development of our countries, and it creates serious economic losses for hundreds of thousands of people living in affected areas. It could be also anticipated that in the near future, the quality and availability of water will decrease in many arid and semiarid regions in our countries, increasing further the risks for the survival of populations living in these areas. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt concrete measures for combating this phenomenon, and impulse the sustainable water management.

Madam President,

25 per cent of the lands affected by desertification from the entire planet are in our region, that is, 5 million square kilometers, fact that has not been recognized in all its magnitude.

Therefore, the issues of desertification and soil degradation are phenomenon of grave concern to the countries of the Rio Group.

We must give priority to the restoration of lands in process of desertification, in medium and extreme grades; to the development, dissemination and transfer of new and appropriate technologies for combating desertification and soil degradation efficiently; and access to financial schemes for the provision of resources that promote the development of local and regional industry, in order to mitigate and reverse desertification.

The vulnerability of our countries to the disasters and to the adverse effects of climate change requires urgent support and cooperation from the international community, mobilizing financial and technological resources towards our countries without further delay.

Madam President,

We hope that our work establish a constructive spirit, agreeing on a document oriented to the action and to the means of implementation.

Count, Madam President, with the collaboration of the members of the Rio Group for this endeavor.

I thank you.