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**Statement by Ms. Janil Greenaway, Minister Counsellor,
Permanent Mission of Antigua and Barbuda to the UN
On behalf of the Group of 77 and China
During the Thematic Discussions on Rural Development,
Sixteenth Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development
(CSD-16)**

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1. Mr. Chairman, it can be said that the fight against poverty will be won or lost in rural areas, and that the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, will remain elusive without a particular focus on rural development. More than 70 per cent of the world's poor live in rural areas, and the rural poverty rate is more than double the urban rate – 30 versus 13 per cent. In addition, the rural poor are mostly landless individuals and households with few assets, smallholders, pastoralists, women and other vulnerable groups such as the youth. These statistics underscore the urgent need to address rural poverty in an integrated manner.
2. Mr. Chairman, the Group is of the view that, in our discussions on rural poverty, we must also bear in mind the other themes of the current review cycle, as they are all interrelated. In most of the poorest developing countries agriculture is the main source of rural economic activity. In this regard, agricultural productivity and access to physical and social infrastructure and services need to go hand in hand when addressing rural poverty. Higher agricultural incomes increase both current household consumption and long-term household assets. They also generate demand for goods and services that stimulate non-farming economic activities.
3. Mr. Chairman, the Group believes that greater recognition should be given to the fact that a large number of developing countries with predominantly rural economies have implemented wide-ranging policies and programmes to create an enabling domestic environment for rural development, including employment generation and poverty reduction. But decades of persistent efforts have not altered the stark reality of rural poverty for reasons primarily due to implementation deficits. Major constraints include persistent adverse terms of trade for many rurally produced commodities, the lack of infrastructure and other services to support agriculture and non-agriculture sector, limited sources of appropriate technology and over dependence on weather conditions.

4. Globalization which puts small rural producers in direct competition with large scale, highly organised and often subsidised producers further compounds the challenges of meeting the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. The CSD must help to find ways to assist rural communities and producers harness the opportunities while minimising their risks and protecting the most vulnerable. The constraints to rural development are wide ranging – financial instability, communicable diseases, environmental degradation, resource limitations such as water scarcity, and more.
5. The Group is of the view that strategies for rural poverty reduction and for rural development in general must go beyond improving agricultural productivity. The international community should support the efforts of developing countries with large rural economies, accelerate rural economic growth, including tapping the potential of non-agricultural rural economic activities. Of primary importance is the enhancement of the capacity of rural communities to exploit other natural resources, sectors and income-earning activities other than farming. Rural communities also need non-farm income-producing activities with linkages to agriculture and natural resources. This will include financial instruments for income generation and reduction of financial risk. These activities have important multiplier effects and are also an important source of employment for rural women.
6. In addition to economic diversification, infrastructural development should also be given priority. Lack of access to infrastructure severely limits the goods and services available for the rural poor, such as electricity, telephone, transportation, schooling, health centers, and others. Improvement in rural infrastructure will contribute significantly to poverty reduction. Poor access to potable water supply and adequate sanitation services are the main cause for many diseases and high infant and maternal mortality rates affecting developing countries, mainly in Africa.
7. Also, distorted agriculture policies in developed countries that penalize the agricultural sector in developing countries and neglect the development of rural infrastructure have been major contributors to rural poverty, and remains a constraining factor.
8. Mr. Chairman, Climate change will have a significant impact on agricultural productivity and livelihood in rural areas, rendering the poor even more vulnerable to its effects, since the majority live in ecologically fragile rural areas. This vulnerability is especially severe in drought-prone areas, where water is scarce and lands are degrading. In addition, the lack of integrated land management has brought about a

series of problems such as serious land degradation, manifested in phenomena like erosion, desertification, depletion of groundwater, salinization of soils, and toxic waste dumping.

9. Additionally, Mr. Chairman, energy for sustainable development remains a major challenge. Lack of modern energy services still impedes poverty reduction and sustainable development in rural areas in many developing countries. Not enough has been done by the international community to meet the JPOI goal of increasing the global share of energy obtained from renewable sources. Urgent efforts are needed to expand access to reliable, affordable, economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound energy services, while reducing global greenhouse gas emissions.
10. Overall, progress in achieving the MDGs is required to successfully tackle rural development, focussing not only on eradication of poverty and hunger, but diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Financial resources necessary to achieve the MDGs should increasingly target health care in rural areas and should be scaled-up. Education, gender equality and quality improvements are all part of the required response. It is also relevant to promote literacy and training opportunities for unschooled rural youth and adults and ensure that investments in vocational training programs in line with national needs, plans and strategies. Attention must also be given to supporting the development of curricula appropriate to the needs of rural populations.
11. The issue of land tenure in fostering rural development should also be addressed. Security regarding land tenancy contributes to social stability, while insecurity can provoke social instability and conflicts.
12. In most of the developing world, women do most of the agricultural work and are usually in charge of household food security. Removal of barriers to access to, and ownership and control of, productive resources by women, such as land and finances, can contribute to overall development in a very significant way.
13. Mr. Chairman, as we endeavour to address the challenges of rural development and improve the livelihoods of the rural poor, special emphasis should be placed on vulnerable groups, including nomadic pastoralists and other indigenous people with similar life-styles who depend extensively on communal use of natural resources. Despite their historical contribution to conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, their very existence and distinct cultural identity are on the verge of extinction due in part to threats posed by drought, water scarcity, land degradation, desertification, and further

compounded by climate change. Helping the rural poor to develop the resilience to climate change and adopting integrated land management that take into account traditional knowledge and values will go a long way to provide a durable solution to the challenges of rural development.

14. Pursuing the global priorities for reducing rural poverty will require new and appropriate technology for poor farmers and rural communities, and easy access to new and climate-friendly technologies, as well as capacity building for adapting to climate change. Strategies so far have failed to bring about the farmers' access to knowledge and inputs, the promotion of ecologically-sustainable production systems, the fulfilment of public health and food security standards and the promotion of efficient markets and processing facilities. Likewise, they have not contributed significantly to reduce truancy, early drop-out from schooling, adult illiteracy and gender inequality in rural areas.

15. Most important, however, is that rural development requires a conducive international environment. A major reason both for the limited trade-led growth in the agriculture sector and for the inability of developing countries to enlarge their share of agricultural trade is the high degree of protection in industrialized markets. High subsidies and other forms of trade distorting practices impair developing countries' ability to compete in global markets with farmers from the industrial world. Considering the potential for significant increases in income in developing countries from agricultural trade, it is crucial that the industrial countries liberalize their agricultural markets by removing trade barriers and phasing out trade-distorting subsidies.

16. In conclusion, improving access of developing countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa and the least developed countries, to international markets and development finance is essential for sustainable development and poverty reduction. A key challenge for both donor and recipient countries is to ensure that development assistance, including bilateral and multilateral ODA, commercial investment, and foundation funding, is used effectively where it is most needed, in accordance with the development priorities of the recipient countries.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.