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**Statement by Mr. Byron Blake, Ambassador
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On behalf of the Group of 77 and China
During the thematic Discussions on Land
Sixteenth Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development
(CSD-16)**

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Mr. Chairman,

1. It is an honour for me to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on this overarching topic of “Land”. This theme is a crosscutting issue and needs to be addressed in all its aspects. The use of land resources has social, economic and environmental implications, particularly in developing countries.
2. Recent data shows that land represents the most tangible capital for most rural communities, accounting for more than 75 per cent of their natural capital. Rural areas, particularly in the developing world, are the most affected by all forms of desertification. According to the Secretary General’s Report, entitled “Review of Implementation on Land” (E/CN.17/2008/5), “land degradation affects approximately 50 per cent of agricultural lands on moderate slopes and 80 percent of lands on steep slopes; and 25 per cent of farm households suffer significant soil losses each year”. Therefore, the Group of 77 and China calls for urgent and effective action to reduce land degradation by the entire international community.
3. The Group of 77 and China supports fully the efforts of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to assist those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa. Since it entered into force in 1996, the UNCCD has become the most important legally binding instrument to assist the international community in tackling the causes and effects of desertification and land degradation.
4. The UNCCD “10-year Strategic Plan and Framework to Enhance the Implementation of the Convention”, which was adopted at COP 8 in Madrid in September 2007 puts a renewed emphasis on the problems related to desertification and effectively portrays “land” as the principal subject of sustainable development, as it links the improvement of living conditions of populations and ecosystems and the provision of global benefits to the halting of land degradation and sustainable land management.

5. I also would like to recall paragraph 40 of the Johannesburg Program of Implementation, which highlights the “crucial role agriculture plays in addressing the needs of a growing global population and is inextricably linked to poverty eradication, especially in developing countries”.

Mr. Chairman,

6. The challenges relating to land especially in developing countries are complex and deep-rooted. They include:
 - Degradation and the threat for even more rapid degradation from climate change as already stated;
 - Competition for land from population growth, urbanization, various economic activities, settlements, etc. and the impact on land price and access to land;
 - Weak capacity for land use planning and land management;
 - Limited access to information technology and systems to enhance land management and land productivity;
 - Limited financial resources to undertake the complex, long-term and low return activities needed to address the challenges relating to land; and
 - International economic and trade policies which force rapid competition, low return for rural production and result in lower employment.

Mr. Chairman,

7. The Secretary-General’s report and other analyses suggest that the challenges are increasingly being recognized and that there are initiatives that can provide lessons or can be built on. The key is to do these at the required level and in the needed timeframe.
8. New and additional resources as well as transfer of technology from developed countries are fundamental for the developing world to overcome all human, economic and social challenges posed by desertification. According to the latest World Bank’s World Development Report the share of official development assistance going to agriculture in developing countries is a mere 4 per cent. Still according to the World Bank, for the poorest people, GDP growth originating in agriculture is about four times more effective in raising incomes of extremely poor people than GDP growth originating outside the sector. In the 1980-90s there was a decline in the World Bank lending to support agriculture and rural development. The Bank is now indicating a need to reverse this situation and this should be embraced by the entire donor community.
9. Several countries in the South including in Sub-Saharan Africa have been developing systems, including systems which increase land productivity and address challenges such as land titling. These experiences can be shared through South-South cooperation. Some countries in the Group are already developing partnerships to exchange experience and technologies related to the sustainable use of land and its resources. This can be facilitated through international cooperation.

10. Land and water management policies are essential to reverse land degradation and its consequences. Improving soil and water use can positively impact land productivity and the resilience of farming systems. Much greater attention to desertification and land degradation by the global community is needed. This includes greater investment by donors and development banks and greater cooperation among UN agencies and the Rio Conventions in promoting sustainable land and water management.
11. Climate change is already impacting in the use of land resources. Already the Second IPCC report acknowledged the possibility that 50 per cent of cultivated land could be affected by some sort of desertification process due to the effects global warming. Moreover, the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC estimates that by the end of this century, sea-level rise induced by climate change will lead to increased salinization of irrigation water. Particularly, Sub-Saharan Africa, small islands and certain parts of Latin America as well as Asia will suffer water stress, crop production shortage, coastal erosion, droughts, inundation and flooding. In this regard, Annex I countries need to fulfill their obligation in the UNFCCC. Postponing the fulfillment of those obligations can threaten the very existence of certain countries in the developing world.

Mr. Chairman,

12. Land use planning both in rural and urban areas needs to be addressed. Developing countries still lack access to up-to-date know-how and technology to deal with this issue. Developed countries need to make access to such technology and information available to developing countries on affordable terms. Again according to the Secretary General's Report on Land there are about one million slums dwellers in the world, the vast majority of them living in developing countries. Those populations are confronted with several problems such as substandard housing, overcrowding and absence of clear tenure arrangements. To overcome this situation, developing countries need to generate more wealth and to accelerate economic growth, including by increased access to the markets in developed countries. International economic and trade policies need to facilitate this.
13. Several developing countries also face challenges related to the issue of land tenure and access rights to land. Those challenges prevent particularly poor rural land users from undertaking the necessary investments in sustainable natural resource management. Nevertheless, it's important to acknowledge that several countries have implemented successful programs to address the problem with initiatives in the areas of agrarian reform, community forestry and land titling.
14. In conclusion let me say that the multifaceted aspects of land access and use are directed related to poverty alleviation and eradication as well as to the achievement to the MDGs and other development goals. Land degradation has serious implications for the global sustainable development. Thus, institutional, financial, human and technological resources should be equally shared by all states in order to foster balanced social and economic development for the international community as a whole.

Thank you.