



STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

AHMED DJOGLAF

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
THE INAUGURAL SESSION**

of the

**HIGH-LEVEL PANEL OF EMINENT PERSONALITIES ON
THE DEVELOPMENT PLATFORM FOR THE SOUTH**

**“SOUTH SOUTH COOPERATION FOR PROMOTING
LIFE ON EARTH”**

St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda, 29 April 2008

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ONE NATURE - ONE WORLD - OUR FUTURE
COP 9 MOP 4 Bonn Germany 2008



Ladies and Gentlemen

Since its establishment in 1964, with solidarity and unity as the underlying features of its functioning, the Group of 77 has made a unique contribution to promoting multilateral cooperation for development. The Group of 77 has always attached the highest importance to the promotion of South-South cooperation as a means for the exchange of experience and the dissemination of best practices among its members.

South-South cooperation has emerged as a powerful tool to enhance international cooperation for achieving sustainable development and in this era of rapid globalization the importance of such cooperation cannot be overemphasized. With greater cooperation, the partnerships among the countries of the South, complemented by the North, can help increase the economic potential of developing world, for the benefit of whole world.

Indeed, over the years, the G-77 has achieved groundbreaking results in terms of equitable economic cooperation and trade, as outlined in the 1981 Caracas Programme of Action on Economic Cooperation among Developing Countries. Although the world has changed, the guiding principles of the Caracas Programme remain as valid today as at the time of its adoption.

A farmer in Asia increases his income from growing rattan with help from a network of researchers, inventors, marketing and other experts spread across 50 developing countries. Thousands of agricultural experts from Asia work in African countries to help increase food production and improve food security. Such examples are abundant in recent times consolidating the foundation of South-South cooperation.

The unfolding global food crisis which is threatening the very foundation of international peace and security is challenge and an opportunity to foster global solidarity and cohesion of the Group of 77. The prices of basic staples—wheat, corn, rice—are at record highs, and global food stocks are at historical lows. Over the past three years, food prices have climbed 83% worldwide. Since March last year, wheat prices have risen by 130%. Since the start of 2008, the world price of rice, a staple food for nearly half of the world's population has risen by 68%.

As a result, food now represents up to 80% of consumer spending in most of members of the Group of 77. An increase of 1% in food prices generates more than 16 million newly hungry people. By 2025, more than 1.2 billion people may be affected, in particular in Africa. The price of a basic meal in most African countries has increased by 40% in less than one year. Half of the population of Africa survives on less than a dollar a day. Africa is a net food importer. Its population is expected to double in the near future and will reach 1.8 billion people. By 2050, the world will have to feed a population of 9 billion, which is 50% more than today. Africa's urban population is expected to triple in less than two decades. Two thirds of humanity will be living in cities rather than in rural areas and 150 growing cities will soon reach the size of New York. As a result, one of the most important challenges facing mankind is to feed a growing population in an increasingly urbanized world confronted with the combined impacts of climate change and loss of biodiversity.

Because of climate change, in Sub-Saharan Africa, yields from rain-fed agriculture could fall by 50% by 2020. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change (IPCC) up to 30% of all known species may disappear by the end of this century.

Indeed, biodiversity is being lost at unprecedented rate. During the past 50 years, humans have altered ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any other period in human history. More land was converted to cropland during the last fifty years than in the previous two centuries. These transformations have an impact on ecosystems and the ecosystem services upon which all life relies. Sixty per cent of ecosystem services are being degraded as a result of human activity. Pressure from human activities on the natural functioning of the planet has reached such an extreme that the ability of ecosystems to meet the needs of future generations is now seriously—perhaps irreversibly—jeopardized.

The root causes of this silent economic, social and cultural tsunami are of structural nature requiring structural, systemic and cultural changes of an unprecedented nature. The era of cheap food is over and the era of perceived unlimited and infinite natural resources is also over. The business-as-usual scenario is no longer an option for the world. It is also no longer an option for the Group of 77.

The overwhelming majority of the biodiversity of our planet is located in developing countries. Biodiversity is the key to development of developing countries and achievements in the sphere of South-South cooperation and biodiversity will further enable developing countries to achieve the Millennium Goals. I would like therefore to pay tribute to the Group of 77 for including the two most important planetary environmental challenges—climate change and the loss of biodiversity—as an integral part of the draft South-South Platform for Development.

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity is honoured to enter into partnership with the Group of 77 to develop a multi-year plan of action on South-South cooperation on biodiversity. In close cooperation with the previous chair of the G-77, South Africa, and with the Secretariat of the G-77, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity convened a Brainstorming Meeting on South-South Cooperation on Biodiversity in Montreal from 6 to 8 November 2006. The 24 experts who participated in this Brainstorming Meeting laid the groundwork for a plan of action to enhance the capacity of developing countries which has been submitted to the forthcoming meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, to be held next month, in Bonn.

Let me also pay tribute to our host, Antigua and Barbuda for its unique contribution in enhancing the solidarity and cohesiveness of the Group of 77. Today's meeting is yet a other demonstration of the unique contribution of this great country.

I thank you for your attention.
