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Chairman: Mr. de Rojas (Venezuela)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 98: Environment and sustainable development (A/52/25, A/52/112, A/52/217-S/1997/507, A/52/284, A/52/318, A/52/347, A/52/447-S/1997/775, A/52/460, A/52/514-S/1997/815)

- (a) Implementation of decisions and recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (A/52/3, A/52/413)
- (c) Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind
- (g) Special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 (A/52/280, A/52/413)

1. Ms. Dowdeswell (Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)), introducing the report of the UNEP Governing Council on its nineteenth session (A/52/25), drew attention to important developments in the programmes and structure of UNEP and to some reflections on UNEP reform in the context of United Nations reform.

2. One of the principal outcomes of the session had been the adoption of the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, which asserted UNEP as the leading global environmental authority, with the role of setting the global environmental agenda, promoting the implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and serving as an advocate and catalyst for action in the environment field. To assist it UNEP had established a High-level Committee of Ministers and Officials to consider issues on the international environmental agenda, make policy and reform recommendations, and play an advisory role to the Executive Director. The mandate of the Committee of Permanent Representatives had also been consolidated to include review, monitoring and assessment of implementation of decisions and review of the draft programme of work and budget.

3. The Governing Council had agreed on the implementation of programme initiatives in areas of global concern, including environmental law; monitoring, assessment and early warning; measures to reduce risk from hazardous chemicals; and facilitating cooperation among the secretariats of environmental conventions. In view of recent financial instability, agreement on financing for 1997 and the coming biennium was also of crucial importance.

4. After reporting on programme achievements highlighted at the recent special session of the General Assembly, she turned to the issue of reform, noting that the Secretary-General had made several observations which were germane to UNEP in the context of United Nations reform. Specifically he had mentioned the need for interaction with civil society and the need to revitalize political and financial support. With regard to the former, she said that modern information technology and institutional networking would play a vital role in increasing the participation of major groups, including the private sector. As for financial support, the downward trend in contributions to the Environment Fund raised questions about the prospects for implementing the principles and programmes of Agenda 21. The Governing Council was exploring ways to ensure adequate, stable and predictable financing for UNEP, including augmentation of the contribution of the regular budget.

5. Mainstreaming environment and development considerations throughout the work of the United Nations system and ensuring overall coherence within the environmental sector were major challenges facing the international community. Even given its difficult financial situation, UNEP was responding to those challenges in an effective and resourceful way, so as to earn the future support of the international community.

6. Ms. Waller-Hunter (Director, Division for Sustainable Development), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the outcome of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly (A/52/280), said that the special session had been the first summit-level meeting held on United Nations premises where a high-level debate in the plenary had been conducted in parallel to negotiations on the final document. There had also been opportunities for active involvement by non-governmental organizations, which had been invited to address the plenary.

7. The final document of the special session, gave clear direction for further implementation of Agenda 21 through an action-oriented programme which clarified the understanding of sustainable development. It also included recommendations for the future work of the Commission on Sustainable Development for the period 1998-2002. Discussions between the Economic and Social Council and the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development had resulted in agreement that future action would focus on implementation at the national level.

8. Preparations for the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development were well under way. There would be new emphasis on the overriding issues of changing consumption patterns and eradication of poverty. The

Commission would also address a specific sector of the economy in detail at each session.

9. In conclusion, she noted that the next review of Agenda 21 would take place in 2002, and the Secretary-General would present his suggestions for that review to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

10. Mr. Zammit-Cutajar (Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), reporting on the results of the work being done under the Framework Convention on Climate Change, said that the scientific basis for the Convention was constantly improving. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was planning its third assessment report, which would have a new focus on the regional impact of climate change directed in particular at policy makers.

11. The Convention was founded on the common commitment of all Parties to provide information about their efforts to combat climate change. The Annex I, or developed, countries had submitted regular reports, although the picture that was emerging was not encouraging. It continued to show that most Annex I countries were not on track to lower emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. Provision of information by developing country Parties, however, had been disappointingly slow because of a lack of technical support for preparation of reports. The Convention secretariat was seeking additional help in that area from the Global Environment Facility. Such reports provided important data which would serve as a yardstick for measuring future improvements and give countries an opportunity to indicate the areas where they sought cooperation and investment.

12. The possible protocol to the Convention, which would be the subject of the Kyoto meeting, was intended to strengthen the Convention by strengthening the commitment of developed country Parties. As a result of recent preparatory discussions, the draft texts defined more clearly the political choices to be made and the path towards consensus. While the main parameters of the emissions targets and timetable had been set, it remained uncertain whether the target would be uniform for all countries or would be differentiated according to a burden-sharing formula. No new commitments would be made, although existing ones would be advanced.

13. The future protocol was likely to contain an article spelling out in detail how developing countries could fulfil their commitments under the Convention, along with a proposal to allow Parties to set targets for themselves and a provision for review of commitments.

14. The Convention was about environmental protection, but it also had to do with sustainable development. In a world

driven by globalization, it was important to alter the dominant model, to educate and to persuade. The developed countries had accepted the challenge of leadership in that area. The message must be sent that business as usual in the energy and transport sectors was a thing of the past.

15. Mr. Kamando (United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the adoption of Agenda 21 had been a unique expression of universal commitment to the formation of a new global partnership to enhance sustained economic growth and sustainable development. Five years later, however, the special session of the General Assembly had shown that little progress had been made towards achieving its goals, primarily due to failure by the developed countries to fulfil their obligations concerning the provision of additional financial resources and the transfer of technology. In addition, two issues of critical importance to developing countries, freshwater and forests, remained unresolved.

16. The 25-year saga concerning the organizations dealing with the environment illustrated some of the major challenges facing the United Nations as an institution. The direct pressure exerted by some developed countries on the Environment Fund of UNEP in the 1970s had helped to steer the Organization away from an integrated approach to environment and development problems. UNEP and Habitat had faced major crises, which had affected their credibility. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the World Bank currently had substantial international influence in the environmental field. The World Trade Organization (WTO) was also involved through the environment/trade link, which presented an additional challenge to developing countries, as they were likely targets for environmental conditionalities and trade protectionism. In that context, the Secretary-General's proposals to strengthen and restructure UNEP and Habitat were timely and welcome.

17. In conclusion, it remained the firm understanding of the Group of 77 and China that the reform of the four subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council in the environment field should be discussed in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/227.

18. Mr. Schumacher (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the Union — and the associate countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — said that, the global environment was continuing to deteriorate rapidly, poverty was far from being eradicated and social development was often uneven. Moreover, the world's production and consumption habits remained

unsustainable, and emissions of pollutants, particularly toxic substances, greenhouse gases and waste, had continued to increase. The European Union regretted that the international community's efforts had not yet produced more tangible results, particularly in the area of rational use of energy and freshwater resources, climate change, protection and sustainable management of seas and oceans, and sustainable management of all types of forests. The European Union hoped that the intergovernmental dialogue on the sustainable management of forests would continue in the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests and result in a legally binding arrangement. With regard to climate change, the European Union was prepared to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 15 per cent below their 1990 levels by the year 2010.

19. The European Union had made unremitting efforts to take better account of the goals of Agenda 21 in its national and community policies. It was continuing to make efforts in the fields of finance and technology transfer, technical assistance and capacity-building in order to help developing countries achieve sustainable development. The nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had reaffirmed that national resources would play a key role in funding sustainable development. The European Union reaffirmed its commitment to achieve the goal of devoting, as soon as possible, 0.7 per cent of its gross national product (GNP) to official development assistance (ODA). Given the need to enhance the quality and impact of such assistance, the European Union was prepared to step up its efforts to reverse the downward trend in the percentage of GNP allocated to ODA. At the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the European Union had proposed initiatives on freshwater and sanitation, a common strategy for a sustainable energy future and ecological efficiency and was pleased that those initiatives had been included in the final document adopted at the nineteenth special session.

20. The proposals and recommendations contained in the final text of the special session could not be implemented without a spirit of partnership among all countries and without the equal participation of men and women at all levels of society. Within the United Nations system, bodies and programmes must continue to implement Agenda 21 at all levels and ensure that the latter became an integral part of every development strategy. In that context, coordination of work among the bodies dealing with the conventions on climate change, biological diversity and desertification was essential.

21. The decision taken at the nineteenth special session on the future methods of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the preparation of the Commission's work

programme for the period 1998-2000, would ensure better preparation of the Commission's annual sessions. The European Union welcomed the fact that the urgent issue of freshwater supplies was on the agenda of the Commission's sixth session; adequate preparation of that important issue was crucial if tangible results were to be achieved.

22. Mr. Spitzer (United States of America) said that sustainable development required Governments to integrate their economic, environment and social decision-making processes, since long-term economic growth could not be sustained without proper safeguards for the environment and natural resources and without social equity, human rights and democratization.

23. There was no doubt that greenhouse gas emissions were having an impact on the global climate and that the status quo was no longer acceptable. The United States supported effective and practical measures to address climate change and had proposed that, at its forthcoming third session, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change should adopt binding targets to return greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the years 2008-2012, with reductions below 1990 levels in the five-year period that followed. Domestically, the United States had proposed a \$5 billion programme of tax cuts and research and development for new climate-friendly technology. Climate change was a global problem that required the participation of all countries, and his delegation urged the adoption of market-based domestic and international emissions trading systems to ensure that reductions in greenhouse gas emissions were made in the most cost-effective manner possible.

24. His Government strongly supported the newly established Intergovernmental Forum on Forests and looked forward to participating actively in the Forum with a view to promoting sustainable forest management practices that provided for both long-term economic benefits and environmental protection.

25. The international community had recognized the serious environmental threat posed by persistent organic pollutants. Toxic chemicals and pesticides remained in the environment for a very long time and were transported long distances through the atmosphere and oceans. His delegation encouraged all countries to participate actively in the negotiations on a global convention on that subject and to work to reduce the damage caused by pollutants.

26. Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh) said that the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had emphasized the importance of implementing Agenda 21 at the national level, and Bangladesh had endeavoured to prioritize environmental concerns in its policies, plans and strategies. It had enacted

laws to protect the environment, set up “green courts” to deal with violation of those laws, formulated its National Environment Management Action Plan, ratified almost all major national international conventions on the environment and established a national coordination mechanism for sustainable development. However, a least developed country, Bangladesh, had extremely limited resources with which to implement the adopted programmes. At the same time, it was facing grave threats of continued environmental degradation. Without international assistance, its efforts to implement Agenda 21 at the national level would encounter serious difficulties.

27. There was a marked tendency to impose complex environmental requirements as a condition for trade with least developed countries, even though those countries’ share in global trade was insignificant. Such requirements would further marginalize the least developed countries in world trade. Those countries required increased technical assistance, not increased restrictions, for access of their products to global markets and for progressive integration into the world trading system.

28. Unless poverty was eradicated, the international community would never be able to protect the environment. Any meaningful attempt to achieve sustainable development required effective national strategies as well as international support measures. While some encouraging progress had been made in that area, much remained to be done. The threat of continued greenhouse gas emissions and its effect on low-lying and densely populated countries like Bangladesh should be taken into consideration in global environmental planning. His delegation called on all major producers of greenhouse gases to establish a definite time-bound target at the next session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

29. Sustainable management of forests was of great importance to all countries, especially Bangladesh, given its large population and diminishing forests. His delegation welcomed the establishment of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, and hoped that the work of the Forum would result in the protection and development of the world’s forest resources.

30. Freshwater had been given a key position in Agenda 21. In Bangladesh, arsenic contamination of drinking water had already emerged as a great threat and required priority attention. His delegation was therefore pleased that the next session of the Commission on Sustainable Development would be devoted to freshwater issues.

31. Mr. Pankin (Russian Federation) said that the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had

provided a political impetus for beginning, continuing and completing important negotiating processes in the field of environmental protection. The establishment of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests had reflected the progress that had been made in reaching a consensus on sustainable forest management, including the elaboration of an appropriate international legal instrument. His delegation hoped that the international community would be able to reach agreement on the recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development on the priority issues of freshwater and sustainable energy.

32. His delegation welcomed the conclusions and recommendations of the nineteenth special session concerning the strengthening of cooperation between various international institutions in the field of environment, especially UNEP and the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as the Global Environment Facility. It was important to broaden cooperation with multilateral financial institutions that provided substantial resources for sustainable development projects, and also to continue the dialogue within the United Nations with a view to finding generally acceptable approaches to the funding of sustainable development activities, including the search for new and innovative sources.

33. His delegation welcomed the outcome of the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, in which the Russian Federation had taken part as an observer. The Russian Federation and a number of other countries were ready to become full-fledged parties to the Convention, provided that it was supplemented by another regional annex for the countries of Eastern Europe. That would reflect the specific interests of the Eastern European region and ensure the truly global nature of the Convention.

34. With regard to preparations for the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, his delegation considered that the General Assembly should not attempt to influence the delicate process of consensus-building that was currently taking place. Efforts should be made to ensure that new commitments to limit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions were realistic and achievable.

35. It was necessary to consider the future modalities of interaction between the General Assembly and the conferences of the parties of the three major conventions initiated in Rio. The Assembly should focus its attention on assessing the efficiency of the activities carried out under those conventions with a view to ensuring real progress in the areas covered by each convention. It was also important to

link activities under the conventions with the priorities set by the Assembly in the field of global environment protection. The relevant UNEP coordinating mechanisms and, if necessary, the Assembly should ensure closer coordination of activities under the three conventions. The issue of funding for those activities was becoming increasingly important, and with time the conventions should become fully self-sustained from contributions by their parties. Interim agreements on joint financing should have clearly defined time-limits.

36. It was high time for the Second Committee to include in its agenda a sub-item entitled "United Nations conventions on environment protection". That would enable the Committee to consider the issue in a wider perspective, including the question of how the three conventions could be better linked with and complemented by activities under other existing international legal instruments in overlapping areas. No doubt, that would require comprehensive and analytical background information, which could be provided by UNEP.

37. Mr. Saguier Caballero (Paraguay), speaking on behalf of the countries members of the Rio Group, said that, while there had been many successful national efforts to protect the environment, action at the international level seemed to suffer from a lack of political will. The Rio Group countries therefore called on all Member States to redouble their efforts to comply fully with the commitments they had made in 1992 at Rio.

38. For them, the establishment of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests was one of the principal decisions adopted at the nineteenth special session. The issue of freshwater deserved high priority on the international environment agenda for the coming years. They welcomed the decision adopted at the special session to establish in 1998 an intergovernmental dialogue on water within the Commission on Sustainable Development. However, that process would be effective only if the international community committed itself to providing new and additional resources for that task.

39. The Rio Group countries welcomed the approval at the nineteenth special session of the establishment of an intergovernmental group of experts that would meet in 1999 to prepare the substantive discussions of the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which would be held in the year 2000. The regional initiatives that had been launched during the preparations for the special session on the issue of environment and sustainable development were of great importance. In that regard, the Rio Group stressed the commitments made in the Declaration of Principles, Plan of Action and the agreements reached during the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development, held in December 1996, in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia.

40. While the Rio Group countries welcomed the results of the first Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, they wished to stress that the issues dealt with in that Convention must be treated in the same way as the issues of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. While a global mechanism had been planned to finance the Convention to Combat Desertification, the conventions on biological diversity and climate change remained under a provisional financial system; that situation should not continue indefinitely.

41. The Rio Group wished to stress the recommendation made by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session that the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change should adopt a protocol with realistic and egalitarian goals with respect to the additional reduction of emissions by developed countries by the year 2020.

42. The General Assembly had recognized on several occasions that developing countries were vulnerable to natural catastrophes. Many countries in the Latin American region were currently suffering from the effects of the natural phenomenon known as El Niño. That phenomenon, which affected several regions of the world, had a great impact on population, environment and the global economy. It had been predicted that the effects of El Niño in 1997 would be the most severe of the century. The General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to implement, as a matter of urgency, an international early warning system that would help reduce the impact of El Niño. That should be done within the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and as part of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action. A meeting of experts and scientists should be convened in order to facilitate an exchange of information and national experience with respect to that ancient phenomenon.

43. Mr. Yu Quingtai (China) expressed regret that the trend towards global environmental degradation had not been reversed and that many of the objectives of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had not been achieved. Adequate financial resources constituted a necessary precondition for developing countries to be able to implement Agenda 21. It was therefore urgent to explore means of mobilizing such resources from Government as well as private sources in order to reverse the present downward trend in Official development assistance.

44. Official development assistance (ODA) remained a major source of external funding for developing countries, particularly for the least-developed ones. In order to demonstrate their full commitment to global partnership, all

developed countries should meet the target of allocating 0.7 per cent of their GNP to ODA. Furthermore, the international community should make concerted efforts to channel foreign direct investment towards the sustainable development of developing countries and help those countries to build up their domestic resource mobilization capacity. Developed countries should also foster an enabling external environment for developing countries, including by helping them address their debt problem.

45. In order to effectively implement the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, it was necessary to enhance cooperation in science and technology and to promote the transfer of technology. Protection of intellectual property rights should boost rather than hamper scientific and technological progress in the service of mankind. The Governments of developed countries should take the lead in transferring technology from the public sector, promoting technological cooperation and capacity-building while at the same time studying ways of directing private sector technology flows to developing countries. The principles laid down at the Rio Conference must be translated into actions. In that regard, breakthroughs in funding and technology were sure to reinvigorate the comprehensive implementation of follow-up actions to the Conference, thereby moving the whole world a step closer towards achieving the goal of sustainable development.

46. Mr. Kerem (Israel) said that the international community's expectations after the Rio Conference had perhaps been too high. Agreement had proved elusive and the decline in renewable resources had continued. The nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had achieved little and had been unable to reach consensus on the major problems.

47. Since the Rio Conference, international environmental activities had greatly increased in Israel and cooperation on subjects of international concern was a cornerstone of the policies of the Ministry of Environment. Israel was a party to some 15 global and regional conventions and had bilateral agreements with several of its neighbours as well as with many European countries. Furthermore, a comprehensive system of national environmental legislation had been put into place. Currently, there were some 125,000 people assisting the Ministry of the Environment in enforcing the environmental legislation. A comprehensive new programme for the management of air resources had also been adopted and it had been decided that beginning from 1994, all imported cars must be equipped with catalytic converters and must adhere to the standards of the European Union. Leaded fuel was also being phased out and research was being

conducted on the possibilities of introducing a comprehensive clear air act.

48. Israel was attempting to formulate a comprehensive sustainable development programme which took into account the need for economic development and the need for environmental protection. It was also seeking, through fiscal incentives and national standards setting, to internalize environmental costs and assist industry and the general public in improving the environment. While his delegation welcomed the general pace-setting work done by the United Nations in that area, it regretted the slow pace of progress.

49. Mr. Rawat (India) said that in the five years since the Rio Conference, many developing countries, including India, had put in place, at considerable cost to themselves, legislative and policy frameworks to implement the commitments they had undertaken at that conference. For instance, it had evolved a national forestry policy and a policy statement on the abatement of pollution, and a national plan of action to consolidate conservation strategies in biodiversity was currently before Parliament. His country attached the highest importance to including all sections of society in the development of a national policy on the environment that recognized the crucial role of women. To ensure complete transparency in that process, a national statutory environment authority had been established and a mechanism was being established to provide relief for accidents occurring in the handling of hazardous substances.

50. His delegation was deeply concerned at efforts to erode the framework of partnership that had been labouriously built at Rio — notably the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities — with efforts to prescribe equal obligations and liabilities on unequal players. The transfer of environmentally sound technology on favourable terms to developing countries was also crucial if the Agenda 21 objectives were to be achieved. There was a need for effective follow-up to Agenda 21 and the broad range of General Assembly decisions and recommendations aimed at fostering progress in the various sectoral and cross-sectoral areas of Agenda 21. The multi-year programme for the Commission on Sustainable Development provided a valuable basis for energizing the international community's efforts towards that end.

51. Mr. Amaziane (Morocco) recalled that the Earth Summit had ended on a note of optimism and hope. Everyone had agreed that the peace dividend following the end of the cold war would be used for financing internationally agreed development objectives. Unfortunately, the General Assembly had concluded at the end of its nineteenth special session that, even if encouraging results had been achieved in the area of

sustainable development, the overall prospects were gloomier than in 1992.

52. Indeed, the progress achieved since Rio had been disappointing in all areas. Thus, the emission of pollutants was on the rise, unsustainable patterns of production and consumption continued to aggravate the threats to the environment, air pollution was spreading to developing countries while air and water pollution were getting worse. Furthermore, chronic poverty was exacerbating the degradation of natural resources and desertification while natural habitats continued to deteriorate, thus impoverishing biodiversity throughout the world. Freshwater, forest and fishery resources continued to be exploited in an unsustainable manner.

53. His delegation sincerely hoped that the international community would pool its efforts to ensure that the next assessment of the implementation of Agenda 21 would produce more tangible progress towards sustainable development. Morocco, which was convinced that sustainable development was the best means of achieving the aspirations of mankind for a just, prosperous and free world, would participate fully in that common endeavour.

54. Mr. Aujali (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the United Nations agencies and programmes had played an important role in encouraging dialogue on sustainable development and the protection of the environment following the Rio Conference. However, no tangible progress had been achieved with respect to the transfer of resources and technologies to developing countries, although such transfers were crucial to their development. On the contrary, ODA had declined even as the indebtedness of many developing countries, especially the poorest among them, had increased. Concerted efforts must be made to solve the debt problem, which was an impediment to the realization of sustainable development.

55. His delegation was deeply concerned at the dangers facing the Mediterranean Sea. The presence of foreign fleets in that sea was greatly detrimental to the environment. The damage was caused not only by the substantial amounts of fuel dumped into it but also by the introduction of new wide-net fishing in the deep sea.

56. His country, which was a party to several international conventions on the protection of the environment, had developed human-centred sustainable development programmes at the national level. Despite the boycott of the richest country in the world and the sanctions against his country, the great man-made river project was now in its final stages.

57. His Government was also concerned at drought and desertification, and it urged the international community to intensify its research in the area of the desalination of sea water and the development of drought-resistant plants, and to provide assistance in the detection of groundwater using new technology.

58. Mr. Zaki (Pakistan) said that the overall progress in the achievement of the goals of Agenda 21 had not been very encouraging. Growing poverty, stagnating economies, fragile institutions and declining export earnings had led to a deterioration of the environment. That continuing deterioration was mainly due to the reluctance of developed countries to implement Agenda 21. Developing countries were being advised to rely on foreign direct investment flows, yet 90 per cent of such flows was concentrated in only 26 countries.

59. ODA could play a critical role in the transition to sustainability, by promoting balanced private flows of trade, technology and investment and providing international public goods. Unfortunately, the debt burden constituted a considerable impediment in efforts to achieve high growth rates. In Pakistan, more than half of national revenues was spent on debt servicing, a major drain on the country's meagre resources. It was clear that the demand for new and additional financial resources under Agenda 21 could be met through the introduction of debt relief measures for the poor countries.

60. Developing countries desperately needed ecologically sound technologies. However, Agenda 21 had underscored the need for the transfer of technology although this seemed to have been completely forgotten. Overwhelming impediments still prevented developing countries from acquiring such technologies. While the Rio consensus derived from a shared global predicament, it seemed responsive primarily to the concerns of the developed countries. The latter kept on pressing the developing countries to take measures to protect the environment even though they themselves had not fulfilled their obligations to implement the goals of Agenda 21 and were continuing their unsustainable and wasteful patterns of consumption and production. The institutional aspects also manifested the hegemony of developed countries over the follow-up process. The proliferation of sectoral meetings was outstripping the developed countries' ability to effectively follow the environmental discourse.

61. The agenda of environmental negotiations should be designed to look after the interests of both the developed and the developing countries. It should be more balanced and should focus on global issues as well as include questions of

serious concern to the developing countries such as the global distribution of consumption, sharing the benefits of technology, providing requisite financial resources and seeking agreements on the elimination of poverty and underdevelopment.

62. Mr. Hetteš (Slovakia) said that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had marked a turning point for Slovakia. Following the Conference, a new system of environmental legislation had been created and a Strategy for a National Environmental Policy and a National Environmental Action Plan had been elaborated. Slovakia had conducted a public awareness programme on sustainable development and the new Capacity 21 programme of the United Nations Development Programme had been launched there in June.

63. His Government welcomed the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. Slovakia's national sustainable development strategy was an umbrella for its social, economic and environmental policies. It intended to implement the conclusions of the special session of the General Assembly step by step.

64. His delegation fully supported United Nations efforts to eradicate world poverty. To that end, it stressed the need for coordinating government initiatives and international cooperation and the importance of basic social services and of food security. It welcomed the reforms concerning coordination of United Nations activities at the field level. The new resident coordinator system should, in consultation with national Governments, strengthen the implementation of Agenda 21.

65. Ms. Trone (Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund) said that, building on Agenda 21, the International Conference on Population and Development had focused on the linkages among population, the environment and sustainable development. Its Programme of Action stressed that a healthy environment was necessary to meet the basic needs of a growing world population.

66. Reproductive rights and voluntary family planning were the centrepiece of the Cairo Programme of Action. Despite the growing trend towards smaller, healthier families, the global population would continue to grow by more than 75 million people annually for at least another decade; the fastest growth would occur in the poorest countries. As rapid urban growth and increasing consumption were putting pressure on natural resources and fragile ecosystems, population and reproductive health concerns must be addressed as an integral part of sustainable development efforts.

67. In helping countries to implement the Programme of Action, UNFPA was stressing population-environment linkages. Through its quarterly publication entitled "People and the Planet", it was building awareness of the relationship between population and environment. The integration of population and environmental concerns in development planning was a goal of its national programme review and strategy development exercises. In addition, a UNFPA-supported research project in Mauritius had measured the interdependence among population size and structure, technological development and the environment.

68. As the task manager of chapter 5 of Agenda 21 and a member of the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development, UNFPA had been closely involved in the preparations for the special session to review the implementation of Agenda 21. In that connection, it had supported a number of important publications, including advocacy booklets on linkages between population and environment and guidelines for national policy makers and community leaders on integrating population and the environment in development planning and on population and development programmes in rural environments. Stronger inter-agency cooperation in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Cairo Programme of Action was necessary, particularly at the country level. The new United Nations Development Assistance Framework should facilitate such cooperation, particularly with regard to national capacity-building, the development of information systems, research and training, and the mobilization of resources.

69. Mr. Vaher (United Nations Children's Fund) said that UNICEF welcomed the incorporation of a number of vital child-related issues in the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 elaborated by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session. It was pleased that top priority had been accorded to protecting children against environmental health risks and infectious diseases. Approximately 7 million children still died every year from preventable diseases aggravated by malnutrition. In addition, the HIV/AIDS epidemic was spreading, particularly in the developing countries, and was even affecting infants. Environmental pollution aggravated the effects of traditional diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis and acute respiratory infection, and caused irreversible damage to the child's physical and mental development. UNICEF therefore endorsed the Programme's linkage of health and environmental issues and its preventive approach. It would do its utmost to support international cooperation in that regard.

70. UNICEF applauded the renewed attention of the United Nations and the international community to freshwater issues.

Within that context, priority should be accorded to water supply and environmental sanitation. It was possible that, by the year 2000, Africans would account for 60 per cent of the people without access to safe drinking water. The number of people without sanitation facilities had risen to nearly 3 billion, equivalent to half the world population. The problem was both quantitative and qualitative in nature; city slums and shanty towns faced the highest risk of excreta- and garbage-related epidemics, as exemplified by the recent cholera outbreaks in Peru and Guinea-Bissau. Millions of children every year died as a result of diarrhoea contracted in unsanitary environments. UNICEF and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs would coordinate the activities of the 1998 World Water Day, whose main theme would be "Groundwater — the invisible resource". He urged all Governments and international agencies to support the event by strengthening their water-related policies and organizing awareness-building activities.

71. Poverty eradication was vital to sustainable development and development aid, particularly multilateral aid, was vital to poverty eradication. Multilateral funding was effective in reaching the most vulnerable groups, building national capacities and transferring environmentally sound technologies on favourable terms. And yet, development aid had plummeted in the past five years. Targets for official development assistance were far from being met. It was estimated that an additional \$80 billion per year over the next decade was needed to eradicate the worst aspects of global poverty; less than one eighth of that total would ensure universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation. That was well below the amount that could be mobilized if Governments honoured their commitments under the 0.7 per cent arrangement.

72. Mr. Hamad (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that the Rio Conference had had a profound impact on UNESCO activities. Indeed, sustainability and poverty eradication were major strategic goals in the UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy, 1996-2001. UNESCO accorded top priority to the programme areas corresponding to specific chapters of Agenda 21, including education; the natural and social sciences; capacity-building; the transfer of environmentally sound technologies; oceans; freshwater resources; biological diversity; land use, including combating desertification; sustainable forest management; and renewable energy resources.

73. Intergovernmental scientific programmes were its major institutional modality for implementing those activities. The Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, adopted by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session, gave strong political support to those programmes,

including the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, Man and the Biosphere, the International Hydrological Programme and the World Solar Programme. In accordance with the final document of the nineteenth special session, UNESCO was responsible for promoting education for sustainable development.

74. During the next session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, UNESCO would participate in the deliberations on freshwater management. In 1999, the International Oceanographic Commission would play a leading role in preparing the Commission's discussion of oceans and seas. At the session of the Commission to be held in 2001, UNESCO would have an excellent opportunity to seek enhanced support for the second five-year period of the World Solar Programme and to mobilize international support for the follow-up to the World Solar Summit.

75. As part of the follow-up to the nineteenth special session, UNESCO and the Government of Greece were jointly organizing an international conference on environment and society, to be held in December, which would focus on the theme of education and public awareness for sustainability. The Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO would coordinate a number of activities within the United Nations system in connection with the International Year of the Ocean in 1998.

76. Ms. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan) said that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had been the first global forum in which Kazakhstan had participated as an independent State. Its deliberations had been extremely topical for Kazakhstan, which had to deal with extremely serious environmental problems. Consequently, the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had been an occasion for her country to take stock of its progress in the past five years with regard to the environment and international cooperation.

77. Despite its economic difficulties, Kazakhstan was attempting to integrate environmental protection in its economic policy. In 1991, it had adopted the Environmental Protection Act with a view to preventing man-made environmental damage; the National Council on Sustainable Development attached to the President of the Republic had recently been established. Moreover, environmental security had been acknowledged as a strategic component of national security. In 1996, Kazakhstan had begun drafting a national plan of action for environmental protection in the twenty-first century, in cooperation with UNDP, UNEP and the Global Environment Facility.

78. Kazakhstan had signed the documents adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

and it had acceded to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It had also ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa.

79. Unfortunately, Kazakhstan was a microcosm of all the environmental problems of a modern industrialized civilization, including polluted water, poisoned air and low food quality, which severely threatened the health of the population and reduced life expectancy; the continuing processes of technology-induced desertification; the reduction of biodiversity; and expanding ecological disaster areas. It ranked among the environmentally most vulnerable countries according to principle 6 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

80. Kazakhstan's most serious environmental problems were in the region of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and the Aral Sea. The Semipalatinsk nuclear test site had been the largest in the world, covering an area that was comparable to the territory of many States. In the course of its 40 years of nuclear testing, including open-air and underground detonation of uranium, hydrogen and plutonium bombs, 1.2 million people had been subjected to ionizing radiation. Since 1950, the child mortality rate in the region had increased five to tenfold. Health-related and ecological casualties of the test site had included children born with pathological aberrations and a high death rate. During the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, the President of Kazakhstan had raised the question of the responsibility of the nuclear Powers for the damage caused to the population and ecology of States where nuclear tests had been conducted and he proposed the establishment of an international fund for the rehabilitation of the health of the population and the environment in such regions, in accordance with principle 7 of the Rio Declaration.

81. The Aral Sea had once been the fourth largest sea in the world and had contained enormous fish stocks. Since 1960, it had lost 60 per cent of its volume as the result of the irresponsible use of water for irrigation, leaving 2.6 million hectares of the seabed exposed. As a result, every year, 200,000 tons of salt and sand were dispersed by the wind as far as Europe and the Arctic Ocean. The Governments of the Central Asian States, with the cooperation of international organizations, were making every effort to prevent further degradation of the Aral region. To that end, they had adopted the Almaty Declaration and proclaimed 1998 as Environmental Protection Year in the region under the auspices of the United Nations.

82. In conclusion, she called on all States to join the effort to resolve her country's urgent environmental problems and thanked those delegations which had attended the documentary films on the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and the Aral Sea disaster.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.