



General Assembly

Nineteenth Special Session

1st plenary meeting
Monday, 23 June 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Razali Ismail (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the Chairman of the delegation of Malaysia

The Temporary President: I declare open the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President: I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (Article 19 of the Charter) (A/S-19/20)

The Temporary President: Next, I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/S-19/20, which contains a letter addressed to me by the Secretary-General

in which he informs the Assembly that 17 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I would like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

“A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years.”

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The Temporary President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly, at the beginning of each session, shall appoint, on the proposal

problem of improving our planet's climate, thereby bearing out the hopes of present and future generations.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the President of the Republic of Kazakstan for his statement.

Mr. Nursultan A. Nazarbaev, President of the Republic of Kazakstan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Romano Prodi, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic.

Mr. Romano Prodi, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Prodi (Italy): When the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development met in Rio in 1992, the world was confronted with a twofold challenge: to make development compatible with the sustainability of the environment and to insure a more balanced and global, long-lasting development. Five years later, we live in a world with more pollution, more consumption of natural resources and more waste, but with less biodiversity, less forest area, less available fresh water, less soil and a depleted stratospheric ozone layer in some regions of the planet.

Today, humanity as a whole uses over one third more resources and eco-services than nature can regenerate. In 1992, this ecological deficit was only one quarter. Five years after the Rio Conference, we are further away from sustainability.

This special session of the General Assembly provides us an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to sustainable development and to a pragmatic, result-oriented implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

The notion of sustainable development, adopted by the Rio Conference, is the key principle by which the implementation of Agenda 21 should be guided. Today, however, sustainable development remains a rather abstract principle, whose degree of application in policy development and implementation at the national and regional levels has thus far been inadequate. This inadequacy is one of the main causes of the shortcomings that have been experienced during the past five years.

Integration is fundamental in sustainable development. It is the only way to ensure that the three pillars of Agenda 21 — economic development, social development and environmental protection — are considered together and that sustainability is made operational. Of course, integration is possible only if appropriate institutional arrangements are in place — and institutional arrangements depend on political will.

Italy shares the general view that the eradication of poverty and sustainable patterns of consumption and production are fundamental goals of the international community and key issues on the agenda of the special session. With the right policies and international support, the number of people living in acute poverty could fall by half over the next quarter of a century. My country is ready to make all possible contributions to help the poorest countries to reduce poverty in the shortest possible time and to improve the quality of life of all sectors of their societies, including the full integration of women into the process of social and economic development. In this context, renewed attention must be focused on children's rights, especially supporting the projects aimed at creating child-friendly cities.

As far as the issue of sustainable patterns of consumption and production is concerned, we are convinced that developed countries should take the lead in the process of developing environmentally sound technologies and environmental policies, implementing the necessary changes in their own countries, while the newly industrialized countries should endeavour to reduce the stress that their fast rate of growth puts on the ecosystem.

At the same time, it should be recognized that the lowest-income countries should achieve fast social and economic improvements without reproducing our models of development and industrialization; the environmental cost might otherwise be unsustainable. It is our duty to help these countries move towards more appropriate models of development. I would therefore like to state again our support for initiatives aimed at achieving the goals of sustainable development, such as the World Solar Programme in the energy field.

Financial resources are essential to sustainable development. Agenda 21 made it clear that progress towards socio-economic and environmental development would require additional investment and finance. At the time of Rio, almost all industrialized countries recommitted themselves to raising foreign assistance

levels towards the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP). This has not materialized. On the contrary, development assistance as a share of donor countries' GNP decreased in the last five years. This downward trend needs to be reversed.

The transfer of environmentally friendly technologies and foreign private investments can also play a very important role in promoting sustainable development, but foreign private investors respond positively only to stable, well-managed economies with a track record of low inflation and correct policies. Therefore, donor countries and international financial institutions should join efforts to help those countries which have not yet succeeded in attracting private flows of capitals to create a more attractive business climate for foreign direct investments.

I fully share the position expressed by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mr. Kok, on behalf of the European Union, on the various issues on the agenda. In particular, Italy looks forward to the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Kyoto at the end of this year. The Conference should adopt realistic, quantified and legally binding commitments on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Linked to the protection of the atmosphere is the problem of deforestation. Italy supports the proposal to convene, as soon as possible, an intergovernmental negotiating committee.

My country has the honour to host the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which will be held in Rome from 29 September to 10 October 1997. As highlighted at the Denver Summit of the Eight, the Conference will mark the beginning of the implementation of the Convention by promoting effective plans of action — in the Mediterranean area, for example — and experiences of joint implementation, and will provide the opportunity to renew sound and concrete international cooperation through a better use of available resources to address this issue.

Progress in the past five years clearly has not been what we had hoped. If development is to become sustainable, greater efforts are needed, more human and material resources need to be mobilized and a more cost-effective use of available resources is necessary. Bad habits and wrong behaviour must change if we want to bequeath to the generations to come a better world for a better living. Governments, corporations, consumers and

public agencies all need to abandon activities that degrade the environment and must invest in those activities which conserve ecosystems for the future.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*):
I thank the Prime Minister of the Italian Republic for his statement.

Mr. Romano Prodi, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*):
The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Carlos Saúl Menem, President of the Argentine Republic.

Mr. Carlos Saúl Menem, President of the Argentine Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.

President Menem (*interpretation from Spanish*):
Those of us who had the privilege of participating in the Rio Conference in June 1992 come here today with particular interest to review the implementation of Agenda 21.

I should like to reiterate now what we said then: It is time for us to put a definitive end to the idea of choosing between economic development and the preservation of the environment. As was already stated in Agenda 21, we need to reaffirm today that only through policies that give priority to environmental issues and to forms of management that duly take into account the needs of regional and national economies can we move forward for the benefit of our peoples.

Argentina included in the reform of its national Constitution the right of all individuals to enjoy a healthy and balanced environment capable of satisfying their present needs without jeopardizing those of future generations.

In order to achieve sustainable development, we must not only eradicate poverty but also eliminate wealth coupled with compulsive consumerism, which leads to unsustainable practices and lifestyles.

Policies designed to promote social and economic development may fail if they are not designed to include an environmental component. We must reconcile measures to preserve the environment and promote sustainable development with the promotion and