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Statement
by
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Ambassador and Permanent Representative

On agenda item 19e

"Sustainable development"

Second Committee

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Mr. Chairman,

As first time speaker in this Committee, I wish to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau for your elections to steer the work of this important Committee, and rest assured of my delegation’s support as you lead us to a successful conclusion.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by Fiji, Benin and Ethiopia, on behalf of G77 and China, Least Developed Countries and Africa, respectively.

I took the floor to speak on sub item (e) of agenda 19, namely “Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa”. I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his valuable reports, particularly his Note on this sub item contained in A/68/260, sect. II. I wish also to commend the contributions of the Secretariat to this debate.

Desertification process is a big challenge that directly affects billions of people in our globe. The particular situation in Africa is relevant because two-thirds of the continent is dry lands and deserts.

Today’s discussion is taking place in the aftermath of the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP11) that took place in Windhoek, Namibia wherein important decisions were made with respect, among others, to establishing a science based definition of land degradation neutrality in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. This decision is consistent with the outcome of RIO plus 20 in which member states resolved to strive to achieve a land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development. These events and others strengthen the importance of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the need for an effective response to reverse desertification, land degradation and drought. In this connection equitable allocation of resources to the UNCCD from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) becomes critical.

Mr. Chairman,

As a country located in arid and semi-arid region of the Horn of Africa, this topic is indeed very important to the State of Eritrea. Eritrea is one of the countries affected by cyclical drought, land degradation and desertification, and it is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including climate variability, which has strong links to land degradation and desertification.

Fully cognizant that the issue has a global dimension and thus requiring coordinated action at all levels, Eritrea has acceded to several relevant international environmental instruments. Among these instruments are: UNCCD (ratified in 1994 and acceded in 1996), UNFCCC (24 April 1995) and UNCBD (21 March 1996). In accordance with article 26 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the relevant decision of its Conference of parties (COP), particularly decision 11/COP1, Eritrea has prepared the necessary management and action plans, national reports related to this convention, and the other Rio-conventions.

At the regional level, Eritrea has joined 10 other countries of the Great Green Wall Initiative to halt the Sahara advancement. This massive green strip will be 7,100 km long and 15km wide, tracing a path between Dakar and Djibouti through 11 countries: Senegal, Niger, Nigeria,
Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Chad, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Djibouti and its main goal is to fight off the advancement of the Sahara desertification and its consequences. In this regard, the Government of Eritrea has drawn a Five-year Action Plan (2011-2015). The Five-year Action Plan highly focuses on all necessary activities that help in mitigating land degradation, reducing desertification, adapting climate change, increasing agricultural products so as to improve the livelihood of the people.

Mr. Chairman,

Combatting land degradation is an important component of Eritrea's strategy for reducing poverty and improving food security. Eritrea believes that action to combat land degradation should be country driven, with strong community participation and ownership. To combat environmental degradation in a sustained manner, Eritrean youth, women and local communities are actively involved in afforestation, soil and water conservation activities throughout the country.

Measures have been taken to improve the knowledge base on desertification, land degradation and drought so that informed decisions are made, timely and appropriate mitigation measures are taken and preparedness plans are put in place. National Agricultural Research Institute has been established and human resource development in related fields is carried out by different higher education institutions. Efforts have also been taken to strengthen systems for monitoring, early warning and adaptation to drought and desertification.

Finally, as desertification, land degradation and drought are interlinked problems which threaten our very existence, closer cooperation needs to be enhanced at the global, regional and national levels. My delegation looks forward to COP12 to be hosted by Turkey.

I thank you for your attention, Mr. Chairman.