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40TH ANNIVERSARY A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR POLITICAL UNITY

UNITED NATIONS, (G-77/IPS) -- Speaking on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the Group of 77, Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of Qatar said: "This is a new opportunity for the Group of 77 to reaffirm its cohesion and political unity in a challenging international environment and to position itself as one of the principal actors in the difficult multilateral stage."

Ambassador Al-Nasser, Chairman of the Group of 77 and Permanent Representative of Qatar, said that the prospects of achieving the objectives of the Group were closely related to its capacity to maintain and improve coordination of all activities the Group undertook in the different centres of the U.N.system.

"We are witnessing today the widening gap between developed and developing countries, and the continued uncertain prospects of global economic recovery and its consequences for developing countries. There is an urgent need for concerted multilateral action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the General Assembly," he added.

He said that the Group would remain committed to internationally agreed development goals and multilateral commitments, including the MDGs, and all initiatives aimed at poverty eradication.

"It is the firm conviction of the Group that the anniversary meeting would allow the developing countries to come up not only with a common assessment on the latest developments on the international scene, but also to better coordinate their positions on important issues such as the multilateral trade negotiations, the digital divide, strengthening of South-South cooperation and the advancement of North-South partnership and dialogue", the Chairman said.

The Group of 77, he said, reiterates its calls for the creation of an enabling international economic environment in order to support developing countries efforts to achieve sustained economic growth.

The Group, which was created on June 15, 1964 when 77 developing nations adopted a joint declaration at the first UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), held its **Continued on page 3**

In this issue:

EDITORIAL	2
FOUNDING FATHERS PRAISED AS G-77 GEARS TO CELEBRATE 40TH ANNIVERSARY	3
G-77 ACHIEVEMENTS THREATENED BY SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS, WARNS ANNAN	4
GLOBAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LOPSIDED, WARNS QATARI FOREIGN MINISTER	5
UN HEAD SEEKS CONCRETE ACTION TO HELP WORLD'S POOR THIS YEAR	6
SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES STILL REMAIN VULNERABLE, SAYS G-77 CHAIRMAN	7
POVERTY STILL ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING HUMANITY	8
DEVELOPING NATIONS CONTINUE TO FACE POPULATION CONSTRAINTS	8
UNCTAD MEETING COULD PUT TROUBLED TRADE TALKS ON TRACK	9
PLEDGES AT JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT REMAIN UNFULFILLED	10
UN URGED TO MEET DEBT OBLIGATIONS TO TROOP CONTRIBUTORS	11
WOMEN STILL LAG FAR BEHIND MEN POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY	11
DIRECTORY OF G-77 CHAPTERS	12

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EDITORIAL



The Special Ministerial Meeting of the Group of 77 being held pursuant to the decision taken by the Group of 77 in New York. The Ministerial Meeting will provide an opportunity for the Group of 77 to assess the achievements of four decades of collective efforts to advance the cause of development and renew its commitment towards the implementation of the platform of action in the light of the new challenges faced by developing countries.

This anniversary meeting would also provide the Group with an opportunity for a common assessment of the latest developments on the international scene and to enhance coordination of positions on important issues such as the multilateral trade negotiations, the digital divide, the strengthening of South-South cooperation and the advancement of North-South partnership and cooperation for economic and social development. It is significant that the timing of the Special Ministerial Meeting is coinciding with the eleventh session of UNCTAD, as UNCTAD and the Group of 77 were born together. UNCTAD XI will be an occasion towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

This is a new opportunity for the Group of 77 to reaffirm its cohesion and political unity in the challenging international environment and to position itself as one of the principal actors in the multilateral stage. Today, the prospects of achieving the objectives of the Group are closely related to our capacity to maintain and improve coordination of the activities that we undertake in the different Chapters of the Group of 77 within the United Nations system located in Geneva, Nairobi, Paris, Rome, Vienna and Washington, D.C. (Group of 24).

The strength and vitality of the Group of 77 is demonstrated by its considerable achievements over the years both in terms of South-South cooperation and North-South relations. Working for equity and justice in the global economic order to build solid foundation for world peace, the Group came to exercise significant influence in shaping international multilateral relations, particularly in the field of trade, financing for development and poverty eradication.

The Special Ministerial Meeting will celebrate four decades of solidarity for development and reaffirm the dominant influence exercised by the Group in multilateral diplomacy as a framework for action and as a political force enabling the developing countries to be the prime movers of their own destiny, and thus set out a vision for the Group's course of action to meet the current and future economic and social challenges. Through an exchange of views on the performance of the Group of 77 and its future role with a view to enhancing its effectiveness and ensuring the implementation of its goals and objectives, in the light of new challenges and developments, a ministerial declaration will be adopted.

**Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser
Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar
to the United Nations
Chairman of the Group of 77**

Continued from page 1

first ministerial meeting in Algiers in October 1967 adopting the "Algiers Charter."

Currently, it is the largest single grouping of countries at the United Nations, with chapters in Geneva, Nairobi, Paris, Rome, Vienna and Washington DC.

In an interview with the JOURNAL OF THE GROUP OF 77, Ambassador Al-Nasser said the 40th anniversary would also be an occasion for the Group to take stock of its achievements, and more importantly, to strategise its future goals.

"Eradication of poverty remains a priority goal for all of us," he said. However, despite increased efforts to eradicate poverty, the total number of people living in poverty is increasing, he warned.

The majority of the world population continue to live in extreme poverty, unable to access basic human needs such as nutrition, health, water, sanitation, education, and housing.

"It is the view of the Group of 77 that the Bretton Woods institutions should join the UN effort in formulating a global strategy for the eradication of poverty", he added.

Over the next decade, he said, there should be increased collaboration not only between the the Group of 77 and the UN system but also with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

This is even more crucial with recent developments, including a global financial crisis which has had far-reaching economic, social, humanitarian and political ramifications, he added.

Claiming that the G-77 has made "a notable contribution to the effective functioning of the United Nations", he said the Group can also legitimately claim a large part of the credit for the U.N. system moving towards a global governance system in the economic and social fields.

The Group has thus been a bulwark in the process of the

evolution of multilateralism within the United Nations system.

The 40th anniversary, he said, is also an opportunity for the full and effective participation of developing countries in the process of decision-making.

Pointing out that globalisation and liberalisation continue to be weighted heavily against the world's poorer nations, he said: "We believe that the increasing globalisation and liberalisation of the world economy requires an equitable and effective mechanism of multilateral macroeconomic policy coordination which should enable the participation of developing countries in the economic decision-making process at the global level".

The Chairman referred to the goals set by the first and only Summit meeting of developing nations in Cuba in April 2000. The South Summit pointed out the inadequacies of the present economic order for achieving the goals and objectives of development. The Summit of world leaders called for meaningful reforms of the international financial system.

The Group of 77 has consistently supported the calls for greater openness and transparency not only in the selection process of the Managing Director of the IMF-- a post that has never been held by the developing world-- but also the issue of strengthening the architecture of the international financial system.

"Today, the international community is faced with multifaceted challenge to effectively grapple with multidimensional problems --particularly poverty--facing developing countries.

The international community has to address these issues as a matter of priority. Certainly, effective mobilization of financial resources for development as well as the creation of a conducive international environment poses the greatest challenges to the international community and to the financial institutions, he added.

**FOUNDING FATHERS PRAISED
AS G-77 GEARS TO CELEBRATE 40TH ANNIVERSARY**

GENEVA (G77/IPS) -- The chairmen/coordinators of the Group of 77 chapters have expressed strong support for the upcoming commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Group. The anniversary will be celebrated at a special ministerial meeting of the Group of 77 in Sao Paulo, Brazil on June 11-12. The meeting will be followed by UNCTAD XI.

Referring to the 40th anniversary, the final communique of the 36th meeting of the G-77 chairmen/coordinators said: "We believe that the tangible result to come out of this occasion is our contribution in strengthening solidarity and commitment of the membership of the Group to the principles of the founding fathers."

"The founding fathers of the Group of 77 strove to build a just and equitable world economic system based on shared perceptions of the need to redress the existing economic order," it said.

"In this context, we welcome the holding of a G-77 Special Ministerial Meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on June 11-12, on the eve of UNCTAD XI to mark this anniversary and we support the proposal of establishing a G-77 high-level advisory group of eminent personalities to reflect on the future role of the Group of 77 for this purpose".

The meeting, which was held under the chairmanship of Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations, also declared its strong support to the United Nations in its efforts to develop its full potential and address urgent and serious economic and social problems faced by developing countries.

"We reiterate the importance of the United Nations as the central forum for dialogue and negotiation on issues relating to international cooperation for development," it said.

G-77 ACHIEVEMENTS THREATENED BY SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS, WARNS ANNAN

UNITED NATIONS, (G-77/IPS) -- UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has warned that the achievements of higher life expectancy and lower child mortality rates by developing nations of the Group of 77 are now being threatened by the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, particularly in Africa.

Some developing nations, he said, have achieved spectacular economic growth. But many have made only negligible economic progress while others have even regressed.

Overall, the world has become a much more unequal place than it was 40 years ago before the Group of 77 was founded, Annan warned.

"I think we can all agree that in the course of these four decades, the world has changed dramatically," he said.

Forty years ago, some G-77 members had not yet gained independence. The cold war seemed a permanent feature of the global landscape.

"And three years ago, few of us anticipated the events of 11 September 2001, or the changes that have followed them," he said.

During these 40 years, Annan recounted, the Group of 77 and its individual members have made key contributions in advancing the global development agenda.

"You have played an important role in supporting the work of the United Nations on social, economic and environmental issues. And as individual countries, many of you have made significant progress in the economic and social sphere".

"If there is anything these years have taught us, it is that opportunities for development need to be more equally distributed," he said.

"Weaknesses in the international financial architecture were clearly revealed in many debt crises that we have seen over the last two decades," he added.

Annan said that key issues yet to be addressed adequately include volatile private capital flows; unsustainable levels of external debt in many developing countries; lack of access to markets of developed countries; and restrictions on the movement of people from developing countries.

In addition, too many developing countries depend on the export of primary commodities for all or most of their foreign currency earnings. That makes them far too vulnerable to price declines and volatility.

Two thirds of developing nations depend on commodities for more than half of their export earnings. And for half of those nations, the revenues were generated by only three commodities.

Annan said that all this underscores the need for international development cooperation to be based on a true partnership between the developed and developing world, as expressed in the outcomes and goals of major UN conferences, including the Millennium Development Declaration and Goals and the Monterrey Consensus.

That partnership must be based on shared responsibility and mutual accountability. "Only if both groups of countries fulfil their commitments can we hope to reach the Millennium Development Goals".



Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser (left), Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations and Chairman of the Group of 77, presenting the commemorative poster of the 40th anniversary of the Group of 77 to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, at UN Headquarters in New York on 29 April 2004.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LOPSIDED, WARNS QATARI FOREIGN MINISTER

UNITED NATIONS, (G77/IPS)-- Speaking at the ceremony marking the new chairmanship of the Group of 77, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Ahmad bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud, said global economic development is not only lopsided but also threatening to undermine the world's poorer nations.

"At a time when the rich industrial states have benefited fully from globalization and policies of economic liberalization and openness, we find that developing countries-- and particularly the least developed among them-- have been deprived and marginalized", he added.

The foreign minister was speaking at a ceremony where the State of Qatar was inaugurated as the presiding country of the Group of 77 for 2004.

The world financial markets, he said, have the capacity to destabilize the economies of the developing countries.

"What is particularly a source of grave concern for us, is the inability of the global financial system to address new and emerging issues under this new world economic order, he added.

"Despite our recognition that some developing countries have benefited from the process of globalization, yet the great majority of developing countries-- and specifically the least developed countries (LDCs), particularly African states-- find it increasingly dif-

ficult to comply with the terms, provisions and laws of free trade.

Furthermore, they are also unable to compete with the overwhelming forces of world markets, a matter which has led to the decline of their export revenues and a fall in incomes.

The foreign minister also pointed out that the world is witnessing major trends manifested in the acceleration of the pace of development, the globalization of the world economy, and the policies of economic liberalization and openness-- all of which have led to unprecedented variations in international policies and relations.

The developing and least developed countries are called upon to stand together and strengthen their unity in the face of the tremendous challenges which impede their development goals and bring about the prosperity and well-being of their peoples.

"My country is pleased to affirm to you that it will work hard to achieve our common interests, through promoting and

strengthening the work of the Group", he said.

"We intend to formulate an agreed upon work program, which shall serve the interests of the Group as a whole and lay the foundations for the adoption of common and unified positions during the forthcoming intensive and complex negotiations with our partners from developed countries," the foreign minister added.

Furthermore, the G-77 also plans to engage stakeholders in the international community, and encourage the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector as full partners in the process of formulating and implementing economic and development policies of developing countries.

At the same time, he said, the issue of South-South cooperation is an important means to promote economic growth in developing countries, and a means of safeguarding the full participation of these countries in the world economy, in a collective and effective manner.

The foreign minister also stressed the need to follow up on the Doha round of talks.

"In the conference of the World Trade Organization held in Doha on the 1st of November 2001, we managed to reach by consensus a programme of action that has put the needs of the developing countries-- for the very first time-- in the center of the multilateral trade negotiations",

he said.

The Doha round of talks declared that development constitutes the core of the agenda of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

"My country with the member states of the Group intend to pursue constructive negotiations with our partners in the North, to make the next round of trade talks more transparent, inclusive and democratic and to realize the gains we made in Doha," he added.

He also said that the high-level conference on financing for development, held in Monterrey two years ago, constitutes a major milestone, as it gave the developing countries a say in the decision-making process in global economy.

"Moreover, this conference restored to the United Nations its lead and effective role in issues of global economy, as well as in the coordination of comprehensive development policies, and in achieving a fair distribution of the benefits of globalization", he concluded..



His Excellency Ahmad bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, speaking at the ceremony marking the new chairmanship of the Group of 77 at the United Nations in New York.

UN HEAD SEEKS CONCRETE ACTION TO HELP WORLD'S POOR THIS YEAR

UNITED NATIONS, (G77/IPS)-- Speaking at the ceremony to inaugurate the new chairman of the Group of 77, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said the challenge before the international community this year is to achieve much, much more, in concrete and specific terms.

These achievements, he said, should have real meaning for the world's people-- particularly the poor.

"The events of 2003 distracted world leaders from dealing with other threats which, to most people, are equally immediate and real, if not more so," he said.

Annan identified these threats as extreme poverty and hunger, unsafe drinking water, environmental degradation, and endemic or infectious diseases.

"We must refocus our energies on these threats. We must rebuild the momentum needed to translate the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) into reality," he told delegates.

"We did see some positive developments in 2003 that we must now build on. During the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva, we took steps to tap the vast potential of information and communication technologies to help reach the MDGs," he added.

The ministerial meeting at Marrakesh last year charted the way for deeper South-South cooperation. And the high-level conference at Almaty launched the first comprehensive plan to address the needs of landlocked developing countries.

In ECOSOC and the General Assembly High-Level Dialogue, Annan pointed out, new impetus was given to commitments made at Monterrey to finance development and build a fairer international financial system.

The General Assembly sent a political message calling for resumed trade negotiations after the setback of Cancun, for meeting commitments for development and for accelerating the eradication of poverty.

The Assembly also adopted measures to launch a coordinated response to major UN conferences and summits and to better review their implementation. And it took steps to ensure that UN bodies organize their work so as to implement commitments made at conferences.

Annan said that Qatar takes over the chairmanship of the Group of 77 as it prepares to celebrate the Group's 40th anniversary.

"Let me encourage you to prepare for the demands ahead," he said. "You will have to help ensure that in 2004, we devote ourselves to the challenges of development, and we devote all the energy that we can muster to tackle these challenges. Let us also in the year ahead, ensure that the promises that were made are kept and that we're able to restore hope".

On the positive side, he said, the global economy is showing signs of improvement. He cited a report released by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, entitled "World Economic Situation and Prospects 2004", which has forecast a growth rate of 3.5 per cent in 2004, with recovery in an increasing number of countries shifting to a higher gear.

But there are still continued and growing imbalances which pose a serious threat to our ability to reach the MDGs, such as the large US external deficit and matching surpluses in a handful of other countries.

"I hope it is an auspicious sign that Qatar will be guiding the G77 in the year when we hope to push forward the Doha development round of trade negotiations. If we are to have any hope of reaching the MDGs by the target date of 2015, we must move quickly to give developing nations free and fair access to global markets and to spare them from subsidized competition," he added.

The Secretary-General also said that rich countries must recognize that it is in their self-interest to open up trade on fair terms.

UNCTAD XI in Sao Paulo in June will provide another important occasion to agree on how national and international trade policies can best support growth and development.

This year should also be one of renewed commitments to the most vulnerable members of the international community.

"We will take stock of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for Small Islands Developing States in Mauritius. The ECOSOC High Level Segment will focus on resources for the Least Developed Countries. I see these meetings as occasions for delivering on our promises in concrete ways".

"We will also need to give more concrete content to our partnership with Africa, now that NEPAD is up and running," he concluded.

"We have to mobilize for that event, and firm up its scope and format. Above all, all partners must work together to achieve significant progress on the MDGs by 2005. If we are not on track by the end of next year, all hope of reaching the goals by 2015 will soon vanish."

SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES STILL REMAIN VULNERABLE, SAYS G-77 CHAIRMAN

UNITED NATIONS, (G77/IPS)-- In a message to the ministerial inter-regional meeting of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the chairman of the Group of 77 Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of Qatar expressed concern over the special problems and vulnerabilities of island nations.

The chairman specifically singled out the lack of market access and absence of special and differential treatment, which continue to create barriers for these countries to participate effectively in a rapidly globalizing world economy.

"Despite the great efforts undertaken by the SIDS at the national level, there has been no adequate support at the international level," he complained.

Ambassador Al-Nasser also stressed the urgent need to maximize international support by strengthening existing institutional agreements, mobilizing new, additional and external resources, and improving coordination mechanisms so as to focus and harmonize support for the SIDS priorities.

The meeting, which was held in the Bahamas in late January, reviewed the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) on the sustainable development of SIDS.

The G-77 chairman said he was confident that the preparatory meeting in advance of the upcoming SIDS conference in Mauritius from 30 August to 3 September will help generate concrete ideas and initiatives for the development of SIDS.

This important meeting, he pointed out, takes place at an important historical juncture as a unique opportunity for SIDS to create a new vision for the future.

The process of globalization continues to effect fundamental transformation of the international economic system and to pose increased challenges to the SIDS in a number of different areas. The Group of 77 fully supports this important process, he added.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg two years ago, the international community reaffirmed its recognition of the specific constraints faced by SIDS and underscored the need for particular support in their efforts to advance

sustainable development.

"The SIDS represents an important component of the Group of 77, and we value and support their commitment to address their unique vulnerabilities and pursuing sustainable development," he added.

Ambassador Al-Nasser said the G77 considers the Mauritius meeting an event of critical importance. "We are confident that it will result in renewed political commitment and practical and pragmatic action to further implement the Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA), particularly by the wider international community."

The SIDS have become even more vulnerable on all three pillars of sustainable development. Their fragile environment has worsened as a result of climate change, sea level rise, climate variability, and their susceptibility to natural disasters and other global environmental phenomena.

Their economic prospects have deteriorated with the decline in commodity prices, loss of traditional markets and declining levels of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

He also said that the regular incidence of natural disasters and their negative effects on the development of small and vulnerable economies has affected negatively the economies of the SIDS. Meanwhile, their social cohesion is being severely compromised with challenges such as transnational crime, illicit drugs and HIV/AIDS.

"We believe that the Barbados Programme of Action remains faithful to the core sustainable development aspirations of the SIDS. We are, however, convinced that the approach to review its implementation must embrace new and emerging socio-economic issues recognized as critical obstacles to the sustainable development of the SIDS".

"We note with concern the unsatisfactory progress of implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and call on the international community, especially the bilateral and multilateral donors to honour and renew their commitments and all efforts being undertaken by the SIDS to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)," he said.

"We believe that the Barbados Programme of Action remains faithful to the core sustainable development aspirations of the SIDS. We are, however, convinced that the approach to review its implementation must embrace new and emerging socio-economic issues recognized as critical obstacles to the sustainable development of the SIDS."

POVERTY STILL ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING HUMANITY

UNITED NATIONS, (G77/IPS) -- Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, Abdulla Eid Salman Al-Sulaiti of Qatar told the UN Commission for Social Development that in an era of global economic prosperity and major technological advances, poverty still remains one of the biggest challenges facing humanity.

"It is a grim situation on a global scale that almost one fourth of the world population-- that is, one and a half billion human beings-- live on less than a dollar a day".

"I should seize this opportunity to state that the Group of 77 and China views poverty as the most pervasive violation of human and development rights," he added.

An effective and meaningful global campaign against the scourge of poverty requires that this problem be placed at the center of national strategies and international cooperation.

He said that national governments-- particular through the public sector-- have a pivotal role to play in this regard.

"We all know that poverty is a very complex phenomenon. It relates not only to low income but also to low achievement in such social sectors as employment, education, housing, health and nutrition. Poverty manifests itself in different forms and involves a set of multisectoral social components," he added.

The commitments made at the Copenhagen Summit-- as well as those resulting from other major UN conferences and summits, in particular the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Beijing Conference-- offer the international community a clear roadmap that can help implement commitments conducive to achieving a harmonious social development for all.

At a time when developing countries are continuing to make significant efforts regarding economic and social reforms, the developed countries should complement these efforts by meeting their own obligations for development.

Indeed, based on principles of solidarity, partnership and shared but differentiated responsibility, the developed

countries, more than ever before, are called upon fully to contribute to these efforts, he said.

These measures include the increase of official development assistance (ODA), reduction in the foreign debt of developing countries, promotion of direct foreign investments and support for UN Funds to combat major pandemics, such as HIV/AIDS.

In this regard, the Group of 77 and China commends the positive response of the international community to support the establishment of a World Solidarity Fund to promote economic and social development.

"We believe this Fund would complement commitments made by the international community to eradicate poverty and would help alleviate the resource deficit in this regard, particularly to vulnerable groups," he added.

The Group of 77 and China also reiterated their support to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) aimed at eradicating poverty and promoting economic and social development in Africa.

"We call on the developed countries and the United Nations system to support the Partnership and complement the efforts undertaken by Africa to overcome the challenges of development".

Meanwhile, the critical situation in which many older persons live throughout the developing world makes urgent the need to work towards the promotion and protection of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Older persons face numerous challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure their full participation in society. They need to be supported and encouraged in accordance with the provisions of the Madrid Plan of Action.

"As developing countries, we are fully prepared to share our part of responsibility by implementing the Madrid Plan of Action and providing the public sector a pivotal role to play in this process," he added.

DEVELOPING NATIONS CONTINUE TO FACE POPULATION CONSTRAINTS

UNITED NATIONS, (G77/IPS)-- Addressing the 37th session of the UN Commission on Population and Development, Sultan Al-Mahmoud of Qatar said that many developing countries continue to experience high fertility rates, high mortality rates, while facing the deadly threat of HIV/AIDS.

Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, he said: "We also face many challenges presented by international and internal migration, including the rapid growth of our urban populations, further challenging our development strategies."

At the international conference on population and development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, all delegations pledged their collective efforts to address the challenges and inter-relations between population and development. But ten years later, the challenges and inter-relations, and the need to address them continue to be high on the UN agenda.

The session of the Commission this year bears particular importance, he said, as it is convened 10 years after the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action in Cairo.

Continued on page 9

And even though there is ample evidence to the progress achieved in the implementation of the common goals and principles of ICPD, there is an equally strong recognition that much remains to be achieved, he added.

First, the Group re-affirms its commitment to address these challenges.

Secondly, the Cairo Conference emphasized the spirit of common solidarity in issues of development; this spirit was carried on in other major UN conferences and summits. The Group cannot over-emphasize the importance of this point in the attainment of a more stable, more just and equitable international economic system.

Thirdly, the Group believes that Cairo provided a holistic approach in addressing issues of population and development. The developed countries acknowledged their responsibility in the international pursuit of development and in narrowing the imbalances in a manner that can benefit countries, particularly developing countries.

The Group stresses the interest of its members in ensuring the fulfillment of commitments to implement the financial targets of the Cairo Programme of Action as an important component of development strategies towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and beyond.

The Group also stresses the importance of the mobilization of new and sustained resources to fully implement the Cairo Programme of Action.

Fourthly, the Group recognizes the importance of exerting continuous efforts and mobilizing domestic resources for the achievement of a better quality of life for our people.

It is in this spirit that members of the group have intensified their efforts to achieve the objectives of Cairo and its key actions, in particular in the area of reproductive health and rights and in improving the quality of health care for all.

This is particularly important in the framework of the development of primary health care and of health sector reforms.

The developing countries have confronted these issues head-on despite serious limitations on their resources and competing development priorities, he added.

Fifthly, the Group also stresses the importance of the mobilization of human resources, the strengthening of programmes aimed at capacity building in developing countries, as well as enhancing partnerships to ensure broader and more intensive involvement within our countries towards the achievement of the Cairo Programme of Action.

"The challenges that confront us are many, but we are willing to address them," he said, "although it is important to recognize the difficulties presented by the current international economic environment".

A more just and equitable international enabling environment needs to be set up. Trade imbalances, the alleviation of the burdens of debt and commodity dependency, amongst other issues, should be placed high on the agenda, he concluded.

UNCTAD MEETING COULD PUT TROUBLED TRADE TALKS ON TRACK

GENEVA, May (IPS) - The 11th session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD-XI) will be a political event that could help get international trade talks back on track, says the conference's secretary-general Rubens Ricupero.

The negotiations of the Doha Round, launched in November 2001 in the Qatari capital, are being promoted by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to liberalise world trade and encourage development.

The organisation's ministers set a deadline of Jan. 1, 2005 to wrap up the talks. But the course of the negotiations has come practically to a standstill because of the failure to meet the intermediate deadlines set by the WTO members and especially because of the debacle in September 2003 at the ministerial conference held in Cancun.

The tensions mostly revolve around the liberalisation of agricultural trade, and particularly the market access of farm products, which the industrialised countries limit with their high import tariffs -- and developing countries aim to eliminate or at least cut drastically.

The stagnation of the talks is one of the key elements of the economic context in which the UNCTAD-XI session will take place June 13-18.

Other ingredients include the growth of the global economy and the increase of trade in both volume and monetary terms, said Ricupero.

The 147 WTO member states have until the end of July to finalise agreements towards progress on the farm trade talks and the other Doha Round issues, such as trade in services, industrial tariffs, implementation of pending agreements, and special and differentiated treatment for developing countries.

But if the talks remain bogged down in disagreement, as seems to be indicated by the informal consultations made in recent weeks in London and Paris, the UNCTAD-XI session will be an opportunity to reinvigorate the negotiation process, said the institution's leader.

Representatives from all of the U.N. countries, including non-WTO members will take part in the Sao Paulo meeting, which will also be the U.N.'s only economic conference this year.

The lack of movement in trade talks is not limited to the multilateral efforts of the WTO, but is also evident in regional and bilateral attempts at trade agreements, Ricupero told a press conference.

Currently, the planned Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which is to involve all the countries of the western hemisphere except Cuba, suffers the same problem of failing to define terms of consensus for fruitful negotiations, he concluded.

PLEDGES AT JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT REMAIN UNFULFILLED

UNITED NATIONS (G77/IPS) -- Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of Qatar, Chairman of the Group of 77, told the 12th session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) that two years after the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in South Africa, developing countries are still facing serious challenges and difficulties in meeting the commitments, targets and goals contained in Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI).

This, he said, was due to severe lack of financial resources, appropriate technology and required capacity. "We hope to discuss ways of making the international environment more responsive to the needs of developing countries in three areas-- water, sanitation and human settlements," he added.

Speaking on behalf of the G-77 and China, Ambassador Al-Nasser said: "Our discussions during this session should highlight not only the challenges and constraints but also the possible approaches needed to improve the provision of the means of implementation".

The reports of the Secretary-General reflect the huge gap that still exists and the failure of the international community to fulfill its commitments in the area of means of implementation, he added.

The review also shows the central role that is played by governments in the implementation especially in the areas of water, sanitation and human settlements.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation contains action-oriented goals and targets aimed at enhancing the achievement of sustainable development. Among others, the WSSD identified actions needed to fulfill the goals of halving, by the year 2015, the proportion of people who do not have access to safe drinking water, and to sanitation.

Recognizing the immense challenges in the provision of shelter the Summit reaffirmed the goal of improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020.

"This 12th session of the CSD provides us with the first opportunity to review the progress that we have made in the implementation in areas of water, sanitation and human settlements. In preparation for policy discussions during CSD13 this is an occasion to look at progress, identify challenges, constraints and obstacles that have been encountered in implementation," the G-77 chairman said.

At the WSSD, the international community agreed for the first time to the target of halving, by the year 2015, the proportion of people without access to sanitation.

The report of the Secretary General shows that two

billion more people will need to gain access to sanitation between now and 2015 if the international target is to be met. The majority of these people live in developing countries.

The international community should therefore support developing countries to improve investment in sanitation. In this regard, the transfer of technology and its development will also be critical. As a result of inadequate investment developing countries' efforts in this area are also limited by the lack of infrastructure for the environmentally sound disposal or recycling of wastewater and sewage.

The inability of developing countries to improve the provision of sanitation has huge economic costs for developing countries as it affects other sectors.

If developing countries are to move ahead, the chairman said, the international community will need to fulfill its commitments to increase support in the areas of finance,

technology transfer and capacity building. This is a necessary and important complement to the efforts undertaken by developing countries themselves.

This is also fundamental if developing countries are to succeed in meeting the targets set in the Millennium Declaration and the JPOI.

The provision of safe drinking water is a critical element of poverty eradication. In improving the provision of safe drinking water, however, developing countries have limited financial and technological capacity to respond to the growing demand for water for agriculture, industrial and potable water.

There are still high levels of degradation and contamination of their limited water resources by various sources

of pollution, effluents, industrial and residential sewages and wastes. Water losses due to leakages are a problem.

Developing countries also have to deal with poor water quality in both urban and rural areas due to its contamination by pollutants as well as insufficient water purification facilities and infrastructure, he said.

Rapid urbanization has led to increased demands for water, often beyond the ability of countries to provide them. Developing countries need the support of the international community to improve the infrastructure for the provision of water, including for water supply networks in the cities and their repair.

Access by people living in rural and remote areas in the developing countries to safe drinking water continues to be a major problem due to the huge investment and capacity needed. Natural disasters also have devastating impacts on the ability of developing countries to provide water, the ambassador said.

"The provision of safe drinking water is a critical element of poverty eradication. In improving the provision of safe drinking water, however, developing countries have limited financial and technological capacity to respond to the growing demand for water for agriculture, industrial and potable water."

UN URGED TO MEET DEBT OBLIGATIONS TO TROOP CONTRIBUTORS

UNITED NATIONS, May (G-77/IPS) -- The Group of 77 has expressed serious concern over outstanding payments to developing nations who have contributed troops to UN peacekeeping operations.

Speaking on behalf of the G-77 and China, Mishal Mohammed al-Ansari of Qatar told the Fifth Committee that while he notes the "modest reduction" in the amounts owed to troop contributing countries at the end of 2003, he is concerned at the continuing high levels of amounts payable to troop contributing countries, particularly for contingent-owned equipment reimbursement.

The Group urges that all outstanding amounts, including those dating back to many years ago owed to developing countries, should be paid to them as a matter of high priority, he said. As of December last year, the world body owed \$439 million to 71 countries currently participating in UN operations.

As for the International Tribunals, Al-Ansari said, the Group regrets that the year 2003 ended in a negative cash position of \$73 million, again maintaining the previous negative trend. At the end of 2003, as many as 111 Member States have not paid their contributions to the Tribunals in full.

"We are especially concerned by the indications that cash levels are slipping each year, and we have heard from

Under-Secretary-General Mrs. Catherine Bertini that at the end of 2004 the two tribunals may have to cross-borrow from closed peacekeeping mission accounts up to \$100 million, which is the worst in 10 years".

The Group would therefore like to urge the Member States to fulfill their financial obligations, he added.

The data and estimates given by the Under-Secretary-General demonstrate that the United Nations has moved towards a better financial situation, which has been translated into three major indicators: cash on hand, the levels of assessments and their payments and the amount of debt owed to Member States.

The Group is also concerned about the critical financial situation faced by two peacekeeping missions UNMIK (in Kosovo) and MINURSO (in Western Sahara) which have had to resort to cross-borrowing from the closed peacekeeping mission accounts due to nonpayment of assessed contributions and in which troop contributing countries have not been paid their dues by the UN for long periods of time.

In light of this situation, the Group believes that this unhealthy practice should not be allowed to continue indefinitely since it has negative effects on the financial capacity of concerned countries and places undue financial stress on them, he added.

WOMEN STILL LAG FAR BEHIND MEN POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY

UNITED NATIONS, (G77/IPS) -- Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, Abdulla Eid Salman Al-Sulaiti of Qatar told the UN Commission on the Status of Women that while there has been some movement towards equality and equity between women and men in all regions of the world, women are still the most affected in times of political crisis and economic stagnation.

"Concrete progress in improving the status of women and promoting gender equality has been slow and uneven," he told delegates.

"We must strive for equal rights, broader opportunities and increased access to resources as well as the sharing of responsibilities by women and men," he told the 48th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The primary objective should be to achieve de facto and de jure gender equality within families and in society at large, in accordance with particularly the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and the Beijing+5 outcome document.

"That is why we support gender mainstreaming as a strategy for promoting equality between women and men. We consider that the implementation of this strategy at all levels to be pivotal. We adhere to the guidelines of the Platform for Action, which beckons us to action to ensure gender equality

as well as to remove the obstacles to women's full participation in public life and decision making at all levels," he argued.

The Commission focused on two thematic issues which are outlined in its multi-year programme of work: the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality; and women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management, conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building.

These themes are considered significant because they are organically linked to the overarching goal of achieving gender equality and promoting the empowerment of women.

The Group of 77 and China wholeheartedly believes that equality between women and men is a necessary and basic pre-requisite for development and peace.

The two main pillars of gender equality are jobs and meaningful work and educational opportunities. These two pillars ensure that both women and men can influence, participate in and benefit from development processes.

The Group of 77 has also complained that the current Official Development Assistance (ODA) is low and inadequate to meet the needs and challenges facing the international community in the midst of poverty and hunger, the pandemic of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, massive global unemployment, illiteracy, wars and pestilence and the negative impact of globalization.

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