

**16th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CDS-16)
Rio Group statement on Drought**

May 7th, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the 21 Latin American and Caribbean countries that are part of the Rio Group, on the issue of “drought”.

Drought is undoubtedly a serious obstacle to development, which causes serious economic losses for hundreds of thousands of people living in areas affected by this problem in our countries.

Climate change has greatly intensified severe periods of drought, putting enormous pressure on rural communities and natural resources, which are threatened by degradation and overexploitation.

The increasing frequency of El Niño/La Niña phenomenon, added to local drought, has led to a new climate pattern called seasonal aridity or periodic drought, in which every two years the period of drought may be extended from 6 to 7 months. This causes serious long-term damage to organic matter in the soil and reduces the capacity to produce major crops without having to use external supplies. Additionally, in the dry years the risk and incidence of forest fires increases considerably.

Also, it is expected that within a few years the quality and availability of water will decrease in many arid and semi-arid regions in our countries, further increasing the risks for the survival of populations living in these areas.

Agricultural production is highly susceptible to the effects of extreme weather events. Many of our countries are threatened with a high rate of productivity loss, due to climate change. Therefore drought has become an important risk factor in investment decisions of agricultural producers and financial institutions working with farmers.

Therefore, we believe that is necessary to support national development programmes designed by the countries according to their national needs and priorities, with the aim to:

1. Develop alternatives to improve rain-fed agriculture, through increased efficiency in the collection and management of rainwater.
2. Determine when the application of irrigation projects is appropriate, so as not to affect land use.
3. Identify the most appropriate ways to address water scarcity, achieving an efficient water use in agricultural productivity as well as managing the use of groundwater and surface water through the reuse of wastewater and desalination of water, as appropriate.
4. Overcoming conventional methods for land use in order to avoid losses in crops and maintain soil moisture.
5. Strengthen the adaptation of communities living in areas prone to droughts, through disaster risk reduction programmes; raise public awareness on risks; and establish early warning and disaster preparedness systems.
6. Reinforce information systems for weather, including those related with the follow-up and monitoring of desertification and drought.
7. Develop communities' capacities, with proper techniques that meet its local needs, their fight against drought.
8. Establish policies to prevent that droughts becomes a source of conflict over water resources and access to water, including having appropriate and affordable technologies; training in the field; and capacity-building for the cultivation of varieties of crops adapted to drought, in order to maintain soil productivity and increase food production in arid areas affected by drought.
9. Develop capabilities for access to space technologies and their applications, including systems of earth observation, meteorological satellites and communications; and satellite navigation systems for the monitoring and evaluation of the environment, with the aim of improving the management of droughts and predicting harvest schedules.
10. Promote cooperation and coordination mechanisms at the regional and interregional levels to have enhanced access to spatial technologies and their applications, including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation. We propose to share, and eventually create regional networks of weather and climate information.
11. Develop and utilize investment plans that take into account the drought in financial risk management, since drought has become an important risk factor in investment decisions of agricultural producers and financial institutions working with farmers.

12. Incorporate drought and desertification in the development of environmental management plans.
13. Implement programmes of capacity building for rainwater harvesting for human and livestock consumption and agriculture, including through the use of underground reservoirs or cisterns in arid areas.
14. Develop programs that contribute to the reforestation of water supplier basins, in particular those with water vulnerability.
15. Establish agricultural techniques training programmes for areas prone to drought.

Finally, the Rio Group notes that the review of the topic of drought must be closely linked with the measures arising from the Ten-Year Strategic Plan adopted by the Eighth Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

I thank you.