



GOVERNING COUNCIL

Twenty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 690th MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 12 June 1980, at 11 a.m.

President: Mr. POPESCU (Romania)

CONTENTS

Tribute to the memory of Mr. Ohira, Prime Minister of Japan.

Statement by the Executive Secretary of the International Year for Disabled Persons

Other funds and programmes (agenda item 7) (continued)

(f) Assistance to drought-stricken countries in Africa and follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Desertification

(i) United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office

(a) Implementation of the medium-term and long-term recovery and rehabilitation programme in the Sudano-Sahelian region

(b) Implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian region

(ii) Assistance to the drought-stricken countries in Africa

This record is subject to correction.

Participants wishing to make corrections should submit them in writing to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.6108, Palais des Nations, Geneva, within one week of receiving the record in their working language.

Corrections to the records of the meetings of the Governing Council at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 11.25 a.m.

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF MR. OHIRA, PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN

1. The PRESIDENT, on behalf of the Governing Council, paid tribute to the memory of Mr. Ohira and expressed his sympathy to the Japanese delegation.

STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR DISABLED PERSONS

2. Mrs. NKANZA (Executive Secretary, International Year for Disabled Persons), speaking at the invitation of the President, reminded the meeting that the General Assembly, in resolution 31/123, had proclaimed 1981 the International Year for Disabled Persons. Some idea of the size of the problem could be gained from the fact that at the beginning of 1979 there had been some 450 million disabled persons in the world. To take an example related to the situation described by the representative of Mali, one of the scourges of the Sahelian region was onchocerciasis, for which the vector was a genus of fly known as Simulium and which caused blindness. The economic implications were serious, since when the flies arrived in a particular area, the villagers left and abandoned their crops if the disease claimed too many victims. Furthermore, the flies travelled considerable distances sometimes hundreds of kilometres, and the cycle started again elsewhere.

3. The General Assembly, in adopting its resolution, had acted in harmony with the wishes of the international community, which wanted the 450 million disabled to participate in the development process. The activities being organized in connexion with the Year included a seminar on the use of science and technology for the benefit of the disabled, particularly for the manufacture of wheelchairs, books for the blind, etc. Such equipment was very expensive and the developing countries wished to set up industries to manufacture it themselves. UNDP could make a useful contribution in that respect and she hoped that it would associate itself closely with the Year. The programming activities for the new cycle should be inspired by a desire to assist the disabled.

OTHER FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES (agenda item 7) (continued)

(f) ASSISTANCE TO DROUGHT-STRICKEN COUNTRIES IN AFRICA AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON DESERTIFICATION

(i) UNITED NATIONS SUDANO-SAHELIAN OFFICE

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEDIUM-TERM AND LONG-TERM RECOVERY AND REHABILITATION PROGRAMME IN THE SUDANO-SAHELIAN REGION (DP/486)

(b) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION IN THE SUDANO-SAHELIAN REGION (DP/455, 494; DP/GC/XXVII/CRP.1)

(ii) ASSISTANCE TO THE DROUGHT-STRICKEN COUNTRIES IN AFRICA (DP/450)

4. Mr. WANG (China) thanked Mr. Doo Kingué, Assistant Administrator of UNDP, and Mr. Magdi, Director of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO), for having so clearly explained the situation in the drought-stricken countries of Africa and the work done by UNDP and UNSO to remedy it. The countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region were struggling to transform unfavourable natural conditions in order to develop their

national economies and to improve the living conditions of their people in a display of militant spirit to which the Chinese delegation wished to pay tribute. UNDP, UNSO and the other competent agencies in the United Nations system had made positive efforts to implement the medium-term and long-term recovery and rehabilitation programme and the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian Region by putting many projects into operation. Such efforts formed an integral part of the development of the countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region, where control of the environment and economic development were interdependent. Assistance from the international community was essential and he hoped that UNDP, UNSO and the other competent United Nations agencies would do still more to mobilize efforts in all quarters, make appropriate administrative and financial arrangements, and work in close co-operation with Governments and international organizations. In particular, the competent UNDP offices should provide urgently needed assistance for the people still suffering from the effects of drought.

5. The Government and people of China had provided assistance within the limits of their capacity. In future, in addition to their bilateral co-operation, they would strengthen their technical co-operation with the countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region through the United Nations agencies - for example, by exchanging experience and training experts in the use of bio-gas as a source of domestic energy.

6. Mr. N'DAW (Observer for Mali) thanked the Administrator, the UNDP staff as a whole and the executing agencies for their aid to Mali during the years of drought in that country. He wished to give the Council some additional information on the situation in the Sudano-Sahelian region.

7. The monsoon was bringing less and less water to that region. In August, in recent years, for example, the layer of humid air over Bamako had been only 1,500 metres thick, whereas in earlier years the thickness had regularly been 3,000 metres. In addition, the inter-tropical front no longer advanced so far north. For those reasons, rainfall was low and the main rivers were in flood only during a short period. Vast numbers of cattle, which were the only means of livelihood of the semi-nomadic herdsmen, had died during the recent dry season.

8. To combat that geo-climatic phenomenon, the main rivers and lakes must first of all be saved by building dams and reservoirs. He therefore called upon all countries which were able to do so to assist in financing the Senegal River development programme, which was expected to benefit Senegal, Mauritania and Mali; \$200 million still had to be found out of a total cost of \$700 million. The programme provided for the development of 924 km of navigable waterway, the irrigation of 250,000 hectares yielding two crops a year, the generation of 800 million kWh a year, and the construction of a port at the mouth of the river (at Saint-Louis), up-river ports, and a dam in the upper basin capable of holding 11 billion cubic metres of water during the flood season and then releasing it evenly. It would help Senegal and Mauritania to overcome a food crop deficit currently amounting to some 500,000 tons and would make it possible to exploit large iron and bauxite fields and improve river transport.

9. Secondly, the general development of the Niger basin must be accelerated. The Niger Commission, which comprised all the States through which the river ran, was responsible for the overall planning of the development programme. Several million hectares of alluvial plains liable to flooding should be made available for stock breeding, fishing and fish-breeding.

10. Thirdly, the programme of the Permanent Inter-State Drought Control Committee for the Sahel (CILSS) must be implemented more speedily. Of the \$3 billion which the programme would cost, 30 per cent had already been provided or pledged. New models of societies based on traditional societies would emerge from its implementation. It provided, inter alia, for afforestation, the development of new sources of energy, the irrigation and intensification of crops, improvement of stock-breeding, especially by creating rich rangeland for young cattle, improvement of transport structures, and the development of a monitoring system for the arid zone.
11. In their efforts to combat desertification, which was a fight for life, the peoples of the Sahel were displaying the qualities of the great civilizations from which they were descended. They hoped that scientific and technical progress would make it possible to avert the threat of decline and appealed to those nations which were most advanced in soil physics and meteorology to come to their aid in studying the anomalies of the monsoon, thereby enabling them to make forecasts and eventually take action. The experience of the United States, Australia, the USSR and China might be especially useful in that respect.
12. Mali had considerable agricultural and water-resources potential since its territory included a large part of the Senegal and Niger basins. It intended to develop that potential through joint action with the seven other countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region. He earnestly requested the more advanced nations to provide the Sahelian countries with as many financial and other resources as possible so that UNSO might effectively respond to the priorities defined jointly by the latter countries. In that respect, it would be desirable for UNSO to be substantially strengthened and for a part of UNDP regional funds to be used to support the Sahel's efforts to survive.
13. Mr. da LUZ (Observer for Cape Verde) said he hoped that the Council would give due consideration to document DP/450, in which the Administrator set out in detail the disastrous consequences that the drought was still having on the economy of Cape Verde, in spite of the intensive efforts made by the Government with the generous assistance of the international community.
14. His delegation hoped that the Council would make available to UNSO all the financial resources it needed to combat both the drought, a cyclical phenomenon which was seriously affecting the economic and social situation of a number of countries and required immediate action, and desertification, a more general phenomenon which in the medium-term or long-term threatened to destroy the earth's ecological balance and required the serious attention of the international community as a whole.
15. Lastly, he wished to thank all those countries which, under bilateral agreements or multilateral programmes, had provided assistance to Cape Verde.
16. Mr. ENOKI (Japan) said that there were two ways in which the international community could help to implement the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian Region. Firstly, it might finance surveys and research with a view to facilitating execution of the Plan. For its part, Japan had participated in the meeting of the Consultative Group for Desertification Control last March. In

that connexion his delegation wished to suggest that the Council might invite the United Nations University to include desertification questions in its research programme. Secondly, the international community might undertake economic and technical co-operation activities for the benefit of countries of the region. As part of its bilateral aid, Japan had financed several projects, especially water-resource projects in drought-stricken regions of Africa. The Japanese Government, which had decided to make a contribution of \$3.6 million to the United Nations Environment Fund in 1980, earnestly hoped that the Fund and UNDP would take constructive measures to assist drought-stricken countries.

17. Mr. BIDAUT (France) said it was essential that the programme to combat desertification which UNSO had undertaken to prepare by means of expert missions to the countries concerned and consultation with the various United Nations agencies should be closely co-ordinated with the relevant programmes being carried out by individual countries, groups of countries or subregional bodies, such as CILSS.

18. With regard to administrative expenditure relating to the joint UNDP/UNEP fund - expenditure which should be kept at an acceptable level by avoiding all duplication of focal points for decision-making and co-ordination, his delegation considered that the Council, when selecting the method of financing expenditure to be met by UNDP in 1980 and 1981, should adopt two main criteria: operational effectiveness and tight financial control.

19. If the Sahelian countries were to restore ecological and economic equilibrium, it would seem that first and foremost they must undertake physical planning to enable the people living in regions severely affected by drought to move to other regions where conditions were more favourable, and implement a water policy, without which it would be impossible to develop livestock and agricultural activities; at the same time the international community must intervene speedily in certain countries to provide food aid and finance short-term projects.

20. The assistance which the French Government was providing to many Sahelian countries through the Ministry of Co-operation mainly took the form of technical co-operation and training programmes, investment financing and specific emergency operations. Over the previous two years, bilateral aid from France to those countries had risen to over 2.5 billion francs. A substantial part of that aid had been devoted to financing major intercountry projects, especially the Senegal River and Niger River development projects and the Diama and Sélingué dam projects.

21. Mr. GADEL HAK (Egypt) noted with concern that in the period since the report on assistance to drought-stricken areas of Africa and adjacent areas (DP/450) had been prepared the situation had continued to deteriorate; the number of drought-stricken African countries had increased from 8 to 27 and several of them had insufficient food resources to meet the needs of their populations, so that outside aid was urgently required.

22. There was a need for immediate and concerted efforts to assist those countries to achieve self-sufficiency. Egypt had made special efforts to combat desertification and study its main causes, and was ready to pass on the results of its research to interested African countries.

23. In view of the gravity of the situation, he hoped that increased financial resources would be allotted to UNSO to enable it more effectively to combat desertification. He also recommended the establishment of a special environmental protection programme for the African countries and urged the international community to increase its contributions to all activities concerned with efforts to combat desertification.
24. Mr. KAUFMAN (United States of America) said that he had noted with interest the reports concerning assistance to the drought-stricken countries in Africa. Thanks in large part to the determination of the Sahelian countries and the co-operation of the international community, substantial progress had been made in building a long-term consortium of donors and in reaching a consensus on the nature of the job to be done.
25. The United States was committed to participation in the CILSS/Club du Sahel development programme. The United States Congress had authorized \$92.5 million for the fiscal year 1980 and an appropriation of \$113 million had been requested for the fiscal year 1981. Long-term assistance by the United States and other donors should enable the Sahelian States to mitigate the adverse effects of rapid population growth and ecological deterioration. With that objective, the United States provided not only food aid through bilateral and multilateral channels, but also technical assistance in scientific research on a bilateral basis or through UNEP and the international agricultural research centres.
26. He was pleased to note UNDP's positive contribution to the multinational effort, as documented in the reports submitted to the Council. The question of the financing of administrative costs for UNSO operations, which was discussed in document DP/494, should be referred to the Budgetary and Finance Committee, which could most appropriately examine it and take positive action.
27. Mr. WAFULA (Kenya) noted with concern that Kenya was not mentioned in document DP/450 as one of the countries hard hit by drought. Kenya had unfortunately not been spared, and he had been gratified when both the Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa and the Director of UNSO had informed the Council of the effects of the drought in Kenya.
28. The Council was thus aware of the terrible effects of drought in Africa. In the circumstances emergency aid was essential but long-term solutions must also be sought. In that connexion, he commended UNSO and the member countries of CILSS which were co-operating in the search for permanent solutions to the problem of desertification. He also thanked the Governments, organizations in the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations which had generously contributed to the programme for minimizing the hardships resulting from drought. He hoped that the ambitious target of the Sahelian countries for anti-drought resources would be realized within a reasonable period, but that would be possible only with the assistance of the international community and the United Nations system.

29. His delegation had always taken the view that there should be an integrated approach to medium-term and long-term anti-desertification programmes, and it consequently endorsed the Council's decision that UNSO should be the focal point for the co-ordination and monitoring of United Nations activities in the Sudano-Sahelian region. It welcomed the establishment of a joint UNDP/UNEP venture to cover all areas threatened by desertification. He was sure that the Council would have no difficulty in finding the resources which UNSO needed to cope with the new problems that were emerging. UNSO had gained invaluable experience in recent years and was certainly well placed to discharge its responsibilities provided that the necessary resources were made available.

30. With regard to UNDP aid to Sudano-Sahelian countries for the third programming cycle, he considered the national IPFs given in document DP/496 to be very inadequate and therefore appealed to the international community for more assistance, in any form.

31. Harvest prospects in Kenya were very poor for the second year in succession. Maize production, which was usually in surplus, had fallen to such an extent that Kenya had had to import large amounts of maize to avert famine. Similarly, despite increased wheat imports, demand far outran supply. What was even more serious, milk production had decreased by more than half and large numbers of dairy cows were dying every day, with the result that children would be threatened by malnutrition. The Kenyan Government had been unable to buy all the fertilizer it required and farmers had insufficient inputs for the current farming season. Those problems were all the more serious since the areas affected amounted to 75 per cent of Kenyan territory. The Government was sparing no effort to reclaim arid land, and had recently launched an ambitious programme which was the extension of a pilot project carried out by the European Economic Community. All bilateral and multilateral agencies had been approached for assistance in that programme. The Government had also embarked on many irrigation schemes in order to bring more land under cultivation. Some 15,000 families would soon be settled in the Bura region thanks to an irrigation scheme carried out with the aid of the World Bank and the Netherlands Government, while 60,000 hectares of land north of Mombasa would be reclaimed with assistance from the Australian Government. Similarly, the Government of Norway and UNDP were giving Kenya financial and technical assistance in irrigation schemes for the inhabitants of Turkana District. In addition, a large afforestation programme should check the encroachment of the desert. To increase yields from arid land Kenya had developed a maize seed known as "katumani" which required little water; that seed, which could of course be made available to other countries in the Sudano-Sahelian region, should enable food production to be increased.

32. In conclusion, he again stressed that Kenya could not carry out all those activities successfully without assistance from the international community and the United Nations system. Kenya was closely associated with regional and global efforts to combat desertification and find permanent solutions to the problem of drought which claimed so many innocent victims.

33. Mrs. MENA (Cuba) congratulated the Administrator on having given a very complete list of the measures adopted so far to implement the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian Region. She noted that the total cost of the 107 projects submitted by the Governments to UNSO was estimated at \$640 million, of which \$395 million had already been pledged or was being provided by various sources of financing; however, an additional \$246 million was still required if that initial desertification control programme was to be successfully completed. UNDP must therefore make sustained efforts in that connexion, because desertification was not only a major form of environmental deterioration but also a problem of development. Moreover, the majority of the projects in the initial programme formed part of the integrated rural development programme of the countries concerned; they were aimed primarily at preventing further loss of productive land, at a time when food deficits were growing and needed to be redressed. Cuba, which had concluded numerous bilateral co-operation agreements with certain countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region, hoped that that programme would be fully implemented. Her delegation considered that UNDP should intensify its efforts to carry out, in co-operation with the international community, activities aimed at putting the economies of the countries severely affected by the drought on a more stable footing. In particular, the CIILSS rehabilitation and development strategy and programme should be pursued.

34. Mr. BLAIN (Gambia) said that his delegation was still very concerned about the devastating effects of the persistent drought in the Sudano-Sahelian region on the efforts being made by the countries concerned to achieve sustained economic growth and provide basic essentials for their people. However, the problem was not only economic: millions of people were suffering from hunger and malnutrition in unpredictable circumstances and the Governments concerned were powerless to cope with the magnitude and complexity of the task. In some cases, the problem was not of minimum subsistence, but of very survival. The Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa had already given the Council a detailed report on the catastrophic situation in the drought-stricken countries in Africa and should be able to give it information on recent developments in the Gambia. On behalf of his delegation and of the drought-stricken countries of the Sahel which were not represented in the Council, he thanked the principal donors for the generous aid they had provided in various forms to alleviate the serious effects of that natural calamity. He also thanked the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNDP, which had co-ordinated the mobilization of resources and the granting of food aid.

35. His delegation welcomed the detailed statement made by the Director of UNSO on the extensive rehabilitation and development programmes undertaken by that Office at the national and regional levels; those programmes were oriented towards the execution of short, medium and long-term projects identified for the Sudano-Sahelian region. It noted with satisfaction that most of those programmes and projects which concerned very different sectors such as irrigation, local manufacture of tools and equipment, seed multiplication and storage facilities, were specifically designed to promote the development of rural infrastructure and self-sufficiency in food production. The development of an all-weather feeder road system to improve access to rural areas was not only an important factor for the social and economic development of the region, but also dovetailed neatly with the various countries' own development objectives.

36. The Gambian Government, recognizing the harmful effects of tree-felling on fauna and flora, had introduced legislation banning the indiscriminate felling of trees for charcoal. It particularly welcomed the study undertaken by UNSO, in co-operation with the World Bank, on energy problems in the Gambia, which could serve as a model for dealing with similar problems in other countries. The Gambia and Senegal were also doing their utmost to accumulate the resources necessary for the execution of projects concerning the development of the Gambia River basin and the construction of a dam to harness water resources for purposes of irrigation.

37. It was encouraging to note that UNSO had succeeded in obtaining pledges totalling \$340 million for the execution of some 100 national and regional priority projects, whose total cost would be \$606 million. His delegation hoped that no effort would be spared to find the rest of the funds required.

38. His delegation reaffirmed its support for the proposal made by the Administrator concerning the financing of administrative expenditure (DP/494, para. 7 (b)). It hoped that UNSO would continue to receive the total support of UNDP and UNEP in the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, in particular with regard to the execution of the Sahelian countries' first-generation and second-generation programmes. It also hoped that the donor countries and organizations would continue to respond favourably to the requests of the drought-affected countries not only for food but also for the additional resources indispensable for the attainment of their development targets.

39. Mr. SHUMAEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the question of the rehabilitation of the Sudano-Sahelian region and efforts to combat desertification fully deserved the attention of the Governing Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, because they not only had ecological aspects, but also affected the international social, economic and political situation.

40. His delegation endorsed the proposals made in the secretariat documents concerning future action. The USSR fully understood the problems faced by the countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region because it had encountered the same difficulties. In fact, 20 per cent of its territory consisted of arid or semi-arid zones. It was obvious that an effective solution to those problems could not be found without taking into account the over-all social and economic situation and strengthening the role of the State in the exploitation of national resources. After extensive research in Central Asia and in other arid and semi-arid regions of the country, the Soviet Government had constructed waterworks and advanced irrigation systems and carried out major activities in various fields - protective afforestation, sand stabilization, improvement of rangeland, water supply and the creation of an open-cast mining industry.

41. His country's experience showed that it was possible not only to halt desertification, but also to make desert regions come to life. Thus in the Gobi desert, from which all life had disappeared, there were now arable land and prosperous industries. The USSR was enabling several countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region to profit from its experience and was giving them many different types of economic, scientific and technical assistance in the development of their natural resources. In co-operation with the Red Cross

and the Red Crescent, it was granting to the drought-stricken countries assistance in the form of food and essential products. It had also contributed to the on-the-spot training of thousands of highly-qualified specialists. Mali, Ethiopia, Nigeria, the Sudan and many other countries had thus been able to strengthen their national economy and expand the State sector.

42. The USSR intended to continue such help to the countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region on the basis of a complex approach; it was not merely a question of halting desertification and combating the direct consequences of drought; it was also necessary to encourage the establishment of a technical and economic base in order finally to control such phenomena, to ensure a rational economy, to exploit the natural resources of arid and semi-arid regions, and to improve the living conditions of the local population. His delegation therefore strongly supported the proposals made by the Administrator and wished the Sudano-Sahelian countries every success in their rehabilitation efforts.

43. Mr. HARE (Canada) said that the Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa had reminded the Council in a simple and dramatic way of the alarming situation which currently existed in the drought-stricken countries of Africa. The representatives of the most seriously affected countries had confirmed his statement by very eloquent descriptions. Canada would continue to do everything possible to assist those countries by multilateral and bilateral means and through the non-governmental organizations.

44. His delegation welcomed the sustained efforts being made by UNSO to tackle the critical situation caused by the combined effects of drought and desertification. Admittedly, it had not yet been able to mobilize all the financial resources necessary to implement the essential projects which must be undertaken, but it had collected enough money to act as a catalyst for a substantial part of the bilateral and multilateral activity in the region. The confidence enjoyed by UNSO could be explained to a large extent by its desire to use procedures which made it possible to respond in a rapid and flexible manner to the changing needs of the region. Its work at the regional level was of particular importance, since desertification knew no frontiers.

45. His delegation welcomed the close collaboration which had been established between UNSO, CILSS, the Club du Sahel and all the Governments concerned; that co-operation was illustrated by the agreement recently reached by the Council of Ministers of CILSS at Ouagadougou on a joint plan of action to combat desertification. Very close co-ordination between UNDP's ordinary programmes and the somewhat special work of UNSO was all the more necessary because of the harmful effects of desertification on the economic development of each country concerned. With respect to joint UNDP/UNEP action to co-ordinate the efforts of the United Nations and the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, his delegation was in favour of including Djibouti, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau in the list of countries eligible for assistance. Administrative expenditure should, in his opinion, be financed from regional funds.

46. The Sudano-Sahelian countries had a very special status in Canada's bilateral aid programme, which exceeded \$50 million a year. In agreement with the countries concerned, Canada had initiated, among other projects, irrigation and drainage projects and measures to combat desertification. Its bilateral action was closely co-ordinated with the work of UNSO and all members of the Club du Sahel.