

Statement by His Excellency Dr Ahmad Mattar Minister for the Environment, Singapore at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

Rio de Janeiro, 11 June 1992

Mr President, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address this historic Conference on Environment and Development. I would like to express my profound admiration to the Government and the people of Brazil for making the Earth Summit possible and for the excellent arrangements for the Conference.

Mr President,

2 On behalf of the Singapore delegation, I would also like to congratulate you upon your election as President of this Conference. I trust that with your wisdom, you will bring this historic Conference to a successful conclusion.

3 The world is faced with widespread environmental degradation. The continued deterioration of our natural environment has threatened the ecological balance of our life supporting system. If this deterioration is left unchecked, the very survival of mankind will be at stake. There is an urgent need for the international community to commit its resources to arrest the present decline and to work towards a future of sustainable development.

4 Sustainable development is the key to ensure the well-being of our common future. It ensures that economic growth and the use of natural resources are achieved within the tolerance of Earth's ecological capacity. It is the only assured way to attain the twin objectives of economic development and environmental protection.

Mr President,

5 The 2-year old UNCED process has contributed to a dramatic increase in environmental awareness and concern among individuals and governments. We must seize this unique opportunity to transform such environmental awareness and concern into action.

6 The preparation for this Conference has been in itself a formidable task. In response to this global environmental challenge, the international community has been able to come together to produce a comprehensive framework for action. My delegation welcomes this comprehensive framework as contained in the draft Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. We are pleased that the Main Committee of this Conference has completed its work and we look forward to the adoption of these important documents by consensus on the 14th of June.

7 The Conventions on Climate Change and Biodiversity are two other important landmarks of this Conference. With the successful adoption of these Conventions, a firm foundation for international action to overcome global warming and to preserve biological diversity has been laid. In this regard, I am pleased to announce that Singapore will be signing both the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Biodiversity Convention.

Mr President,

8 Agenda 21 contains many useful action programmes which would help us in halting and reversing the effects of environmental degradation. I am confident that the document will serve as a good basis upon which environmentally sound policies and measures could be formulated for the decades ahead.

9 The successful implementation of Agenda 21 however depends on a number of factors. The most important of these is the question of financial resources. Without adequate financial resources, it would be difficult for developing countries to implement Agenda 21. I hope that the Earth Summit will result in an assured flow of new and additional financial resources to assist the developing countries. In this context, we must also bear in mind that a supportive international economic environment would also help the developing countries in generating their own resources for development.

Mr President,

10 Developing countries require technology, particularly environmentally sound technology, in order to achieve sustainable development. The timely application of appropriate technology will help developing countries to avoid environmental pitfalls experienced by the developed countries. Many of the action programmes under Agenda 21 are technology-related. The process of technology transfer and sharing must therefore be accelerated in order to provide the developing countries with the capacity and means to undertake early action in these areas.

11 The successful implementation of the outcome of UNCED will also depend on how countries cooperate with each other under a new global partnership. We hope that the spirit of cooperation which has been evident during the preparatory process for this Conference will continue to prevail after Rio.

12 Singapore is honoured to be given a significant role in chairing the UNCED preparatory process. We will continue to help forge an international consensus on environment and development. In the regional context, Singapore will continue to work closely with her ASEAN partners on environmental matters. At the recent ASEAN Summit held in Singapore, the ASEAN Heads of Government reiterated their commitment to the principle of sustainable development. The ASEAN Environment Ministers also adopted the Singapore Resolution on Environment and Development and agreed to work towards the harmonization of environmental standards within the region.

Mr President,

13 Singapore believes that the real solution to global environmental problems begins at home. The protection of the local environment by individual nations is the first step towards safeguarding the global environment. After Rio, individual nations must undertake to translate the outcome of this Summit into national policies and programmes. This must include the setting up of national priorities for action.

14 Singapore attaches great importance to national action on the environment. We began our own programmes to protect the environment some 30 years ago at the time when Singapore started to industrialize. As a result, we were able to put into place the necessary legislation and infrastructure for environmental protection. This has contributed greatly to our ability to ensure compatibility between economic progress and the enhancement of the environment.

15 Singapore also believes that with proper land-use planning and the sound application of the “pollution prevention” principle, the twin objectives of economic development and environmental protection are achievable.

16 Singapore aspires to be a Green City by the year 2000. It will be a city of quality environment with a people committed to the cause of environmental protection. To achieve these goals, we have produced the “Singapore Green Plan” which charts the strategic directions for our environmental policies over the next decade.

17 Singapore would be pleased to share her experience in urban environmental management and protection with other countries. We hope to be able to facilitate the transfer of environmental technology in the Asia-Pacific region.

Mr President,

18 The outcome of the 1992 Earth Summit will be a good measure of our political commitment to sustainable development. The Summit marks the beginning of a long-term endeavour to save our planet Earth. I am confident that the adoption of the Rio Declaration will bring about a new world ethic towards our living environment.

19 We are at the turning point of a new era of global environmental partnership. Individually and collectively, nations must now commit themselves to achieve the noble goals set at this historic Conference. It is our duties to do so as inhabitants and custodians of Planet Earth.

20 Thank you.

SOURCE: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Singapore.