

**Keynote Address by H.E. Mr. Daniel Carmon, Vice-Chairman of CSD-16  
Deputy Permanent Representative of Israel  
to the United Nations in New York**

**At the Third ECE Regional Implementation Meeting  
on Sustainable Development  
(Geneva, 28-29 January 2008)**

Thank you.

Mr. Chairman,  
Executive Secretary Mr. Belka,  
Deputy Executive Secretary Ms. Barka,  
Secretary of State Mr. Botsch,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure to address this important regional implementation meeting.

Ambassador Carmon is unable to join us today due to his role in coordinating the UN International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, which is being observed today at the UN Headquarters in New York.

Ambassador Carmon has asked me to deliver this statement on his behalf.

Mr. Chairman,

Regional implementation meetings are critical components of the global sustainable development agenda. They provide an important opportunity for a focused evaluation of progress in regional sustainable development and for addressing region-specific challenges.

Furthermore, regional implementation meetings complement the global work of the Commission on Sustainable Development by highlighting the regional perspectives on the thematic cluster of issues before the CSD, thereby enriching the discussions during the CSD sessions.

The previous ECE RIMs, focusing on water- and energy-related clusters, were highly successful. They helped elevate the discussions at the CSD on water conservation, on integrated water resource management and on renewable energy, to name but a few examples.

I am convinced that this third regional implementation meeting will likewise bring unique perspectives to the global discussions on the thematic issues of agriculture, rural

development, land, drought, desertification and Africa, which will be the thematic focus of the upcoming CSD-16 and CSD-17.

Mr. Chairman,

The current cluster of issues before us may be called “the bread and butter” cluster. They concern the daily food security of the world.

One may be tempted to say that while this cluster is relevant to Africa, Asia and Latin America, it is much less so to the ECE region.

To be sure, the agricultural production systems in the ECE region are highly advanced. The region has seen continuing progress in meeting growing demand for quality food, in particular organic food products. Countries in the ECE region have made important strides in reducing agricultural inputs while maintaining high productivity.

As a net food exporter, the ECE region continues contributing to global food security and the ongoing efforts to meeting the MDG targets on hunger and poverty reductions.

However, in some countries, including transition countries, considerable environmental challenges remain, especially in land management, in combating drought and desertification and in promoting sustainable agriculture.

Given the large number of developed countries in the region, another challenge for the ECE region is that of leadership. Developed countries in the region have a responsibility to lead by example in investing in sustainable agriculture, and in protecting and conserving the environmental assets in rural areas.

We also need to build on recent results in reforming our agricultural sector by pressing ahead with trade liberalization and by making our agricultural production greener, more environment-friendly, more climate-friendly, and less input-intensive.

On the issue of bio-energy, the ECE member States also have an opportunity, as well as a challenge, to demonstrate to the international community that there exists a balanced approach to continuing expanding bio-energy while protecting the natural resource base for sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman,

Member States in the ECE region continue facing challenges in sustainable land management, in addressing the impacts of drought, land degradation and desertification.

Often, these issues have come under the spotlight because of growing concern over climate change. Pictures of dried riverbeds, eroded soil, and forest fires have reminded us of the impacts of climate change, and of the fragility of our ecosystems and the ecological stresses they are under.

We therefore must address the inter-linkages among these issues. We need to address the thematic issues of agriculture, rural development, land, drought and desertification in an integrated manner. We can also link the debate on these issues with the debate on climate change. This will help achieve synergetic results in implementing the three Rio Conventions.

In this regard, ECE member States must take the lead in formulating and implementing climate change adaptation strategies in agriculture, rural development, land management, drought preparedness, and in combating desertification.

And we must share our knowledge and technologies with partner developing countries.

Mr. Chairman,

In his recent message to the Beijing International Conference on Combating Desertification, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made it clear that desertification and land degradation are a complex challenge with long-term social, economic and environmental implications.

While some two billion people in the world today depend on the fragile ecosystems in arid and semi-arid areas, ninety per cent of them live in the developing world, where increasing ecological stresses caused by desertification are threatening livelihoods.

What we are witnessing now is a vicious cycle. As the degraded land loses value, investments in agriculture and rural development in the affected regions decline even more. This only worsens rural poverty and hampers sustainable development, setting back progress in reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

Member States in the ECE region must seize this challenge and work in close solidarity and partnership with affected developing countries by increasing official development assistance, contributing to institutional and human capacities building and disseminating knowledge and technology in drought-resistant agriculture and in rehabilitation of degraded land.

By tapping into its specialized pool of expertise in agriculture in arid and semi-arid areas, Israel has been working together with developing countries in building their technical capacities in this field.

We believe we can do more. That is why last December Israel took the lead in sponsoring a resolution on agricultural technology for development, in which the General Assembly called upon member States to make greater efforts to promote the development and transfer of appropriate technologies.

Let me take this opportunity to reaffirm Israel's commitment to continuing expanding its technical cooperation programmes in this area in the coming years.

Mr. Chairman,

Such partnerships are of great value in supporting the sustainable development of Africa. We have noted with great pleasure the keynote presentation tomorrow by the Deputy Executive Secretary of UN Economic Commission for Africa, Ms. Lalla Ben Barka.

Her participation in this RIM is an encouraging demonstration of the UN system working together in partnership to help meet the sustainable development challenge facing Africa.

I also wish to take this opportunity to join Executive Secretary Mr. Belka in thanking the UNCCD Secretariat, WMO, FAO, UN-DESA as well as the Africa Partnership Forum Support Unit of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development for their contributions to this RIM.

I have also noted the participation of Major Groups in this meeting and I thank them for their engagement. As implementation actors with practical experience on the ground, Major Groups have a lot to contribute – in raising awareness, in sharing knowledge and information, in education and capacity-building, and in advancing policy debate.

Mr. Chairman,

Whether it is climate change, loss of biodiversity, depletion of natural resources, drought and desertification, or hunger, poverty, diseases, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of access to water, sanitation and energy, these are complex, inter-linked, long-term sustainable development challenges. Often, our attention is preoccupied with immediate crises, and these long-term challenges are put on the back-burners. These challenges, for many countries, are urgent, and we must reach out to them.

Regional implementation meetings like this one, focusing on long-term sustainability issues, serve as a timely reminder to policy makers - let us not lose sight of the future. What we do today help determine what our future looks like.

On behalf of the CSD-16 Bureau, I wish the third ECE regional implementation meeting great success!

Mr. Chairman,

This concludes Ambassador Carmon's statement. Thank you all for your attention.