



THE GROUP OF 77 & CHINA

ROME CHAPTER

MESSAGE BY H. E. ASITHA PERERA – AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY & PLENIPOTENTIARY TO ITALY AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SRI LANKA TO THE FAO & UN AGENCIES IN ROME

ON THE OCCASSION OF TAKING OVER AS CHAIRPERSON
OF THE G77 & CHINA - Rome Chapter

Directeur – de – Cabinet of the DG FAO –

Ms Fernanda Guerrieri

Chairperson - H. E. Ambassador Gladys Urbaneha Duràn, Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues & Dear Friends.

Let me begin by wishing all of you “A Happy & Prosperous 2013.”

Permit me to express my sincere gratitude and that of the Government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka, for the trust and confidence placed in proposing Sri Lanka and myself, as Chair of the G77 & China Group.

Indeed, I also wish to thank all members of the G-77 & China Group, especially my Colleagues in the Asia Group for the honour and trust bestowed upon me.

May I also take this opportunity to thank the Chairs as well as members of the Regional groups in the G-77 & China, for having endorsed and confirmed this proposal.

I wish to extend my sincere thanks to the Directeur – de – Cabinet of the DG FAO - Ms Fernanda Guerrieri for honouring us with her presence today, at the handover plenary.

I also hope that under his astute and able stewardship, the Director General of the FAO Dr Josè Graziano da Silva would be able overcome the many challenges we are facing today. Let me also extend the unstinted support and encouragement of the Chair of G-77 & China to the Director General and staff of the FAO.

Dear Colleagues, I would also like to acknowledge the able guidance and co-operation from the outgoing Chair H. E. Ambassador Gladys Urbaneha Duràn and especially for her outstanding leadership throughout the past year which has led our Group through important negotiations and accomplishments on our journey towards the eradication of poverty and also work towards sustainable development. May I also extend my sincere thanks to the Alternate Permanent Representative of the delegation of Venezuela - Mr Manuel Claros for the support and co-operation extended. I would also like to acknowledge the ample support and co-operation extended to me by the staff of the G77 & China secretariat and the staff of my Embassy.

May I also extend my heartfelt congratulations to His Excellency Dominique Awono Essama, Ambassador of the Republic of Cameroon to Italy and Permanent Representative to the UN agencies in Rome, on his election as the new Vice Chair of the G77 & China Group. Indeed, I look forward to working very closely with you and seek your support and guidance.



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My friends, it was in June 1964 that a group of some 77 countries (*it is now some 132 countries, of which we have, 82, represented in Rome*) who agreed on a joint declaration at the first United Nations Conference on Trade & Development, re-affirming their common goals of Unity, Solidarity and Development.

The first Ministerial meeting of the G77 held in Algiers, adopted the “Charter of Algiers” on the 25th of October 1967, which set forth the “Group’s Strategic vision & Objectives”

Excellencies, although the world is changing rapidly in a number of ways - particularly for the developing countries, the founding vision of the G-77 is more valid than ever. Today, developing countries represent an overwhelming majority of both the world’s population and United Nations member states. Development issues pertaining to the Global Economic agenda can only be advanced through multilateral processes and negotiations. Our collective interests and the successful pursuit of these interests, depend on our ability to effectively mobilize our members, and to maintain the most unified positions, whenever our common development goals are at stake.

Indeed, despite our great diversity, we have managed to maintain a common front over the years. Sri Lanka intends to continue this tradition. The spirit of consultation and solidarity that prevails in our group has been a great strength. It has helped us consolidate our acquired experience and safeguard our strategic interests.

In the year 2013, I hope to promote our collective view on a number of major issues, including the ongoing Global Financial and Economic crisis, the Millennium Development Goals, the Five Strategic Objectives, sustainable development, Internationally agreed development goals and inter alia, South - South co-operation by following the road map established by the South Summits.

In order to achieve the aforementioned, we must inter alia, strengthen our communication mechanisms, have more effective co-ordination and establish “open channels” with other countries. Indeed, our unity is our strength and we must **never** forget this.

Distinguished Colleagues, 2013 is a very important year. Statistics reveal, that we still have almost One Thousand Million, (*over 868 Million to be precise*) hungry people worldwide, most of whom eke out a living within our very own borders. You may also note that 1.3 Billion tons of food that is produced for human consumption, is lost or wasted annually.

The region from where I come from, the Asia Pacific, remains home to 2 out of every 3 of the world’s hungry people, 62% of the undernourished population of the world lives in this region. Nevertheless, there has been a dramatic progress in poverty reduction across the region. The World Bank reports that in 1981 more than 47% of Asians lived in poverty. Now the figure has improved to between 10 and 15%. Indeed, this is no reason for complacency, much still remains to be done.

Excellencies, we know that peace, is a pre-condition for food security, and food security is a condition for social stability and security in all senses. Sri Lanka is a clear example of this connection. In the last 3 to 4 years, with a combination of peace and political commitment under the leadership of President Rajapaksa it, has quickly gained ground in the fight against hunger and social and Economic development. I am proud to say that over the last few years Sri Lanka has achieved self-sufficiency in rice production.



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In conclusion, may I say that I intend to maintain an open dialogue and in all humility, solicit the fullest cooperation of Member States/Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Regional groups of Africa, Asia, Latin-America, the Caribbean as well as the Near East, regarding our future initiatives taken together, through the various technical Committees and governing bodies during my tenure. The onerous tasks, workload and challenges ahead, make it a sine qua non that we support each other.

It was the British poet and writer Bernard Shaw who once said and I quote “You see things and ask why”?

But I dream things that never were and I ask “why not”?

Finally, let us remember these visionary lines and work tirelessly in unison, to support our common aspirations, interests, goals and help realize the dreams of the great countries we represent.

I thank you all for your patient hearing and wish you a very pleasant evening.