STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MUNIR AKRAM, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF PAKISTAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL’S OPEN DEBATE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONFLICT, 25 JUNE 2007

Mr. President,

1. I would like to felicitate you, Ambassador Verbeke, and the Belgian delegation for the skilful guidance of the Council’s work during this month. Let me also express our appreciation to Ambassador Khalilzad and the United States delegation for a successful Presidency of the Council last month.

2. We welcome Belgium’s initiative in organizing this open debate on natural resources and conflict. The Presidency’s paper offers an excellent analysis of the link between natural resources and conflict. It is an issue of special significance for the developing countries, many of which have suffered from the exploitation of their natural resources during and after the colonial era. The exploitation of natural resources is, at times, the cause of conflict, indeed, often the very objective of war. The profits of exploitation also fuel and sustain conflicts.

Mr. President,

3. The creation of the United Nations coincided with and contributed to the era of decolonization and independence for many of its present Member States. It soon became apparent to these nascent States that their political independence would not be complete without the exercise of full sovereignty and control over their natural resources. Yet, illegal and externally orchestrated exploitation of natural resources in the developing world continues, in old and new forms, specially in Africa. It has been said that “Africa is rich, but its people are poor.” It is no accident, therefore, that so many conflicts continue to afflict this great Continent.

4. The Security Council has expressed its concern about this issue in the past. The Kassem report (S/2003/1027) presented an excellent analysis of the continuing exploitation of the natural resources of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Security Council’s Presidential Statement of 19 November 2003 condemned this exploitation. In varying degrees, the analysis of the Kassem report could be applied to past and current events in several other resource – rich African and other developing countries. More specific initiatives have been undertaken, significantly, outside the United Nations, including the Kimberly process and the OECD Guidelines. Absence of specific UN action perhaps signals the difficulty encountered in the past in reaching agreement on meaningful measures within the Security Council and other UN bodies.

5. This reluctance was manifest in November 2003 when the Pakistan delegation in the Security Council circulated a draft resolution on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and arms trafficking in the DRC. The eventual decisions of the Council did not
act on some central recommendations of the Kassem panel, which was discontinued. This debate in the Council offers an opportunity to initiate a broader and more comprehensive approach to the issue, covering the whole range of conflicts, and the different actions required at three stages: before, during and after a conflict. While the Security Council should undertake action within its competence, relating to the issues on its Agenda, comprehensive action will be needed also by the other competent organs: the General Assembly, ECOSOC and the Peace Building Commission.

6. The Pakistan delegation would strongly recommend that the Security Council should establish a new Task Force of Experts to study the exploitation of natural resources in the context of the number of conflict situations on its agenda, specially the complex crises in Africa. The Security Council’s approach of utilizing sanctions to control arms trafficking and natural resource exploitation has proved unfortunately too narrow and inappropriate in responding to various situations. More extensive measures, including border controls and wider monitoring, are required. Peacekeeping forces could be provided with the mandate and capacity for monitoring and interdiction of illegal exploitation, transportation and trade in natural resources. However, it is vital to address not only the supply but also the demand for natural resources. It is the demand for resources, mostly from the advanced countries, and the financing provided for exploitation and marketing of natural resources, which makes possible the vicious circle of commerce and conflict.

7. The Security Council or, if this is not possible, the General Assembly, could adopt certain norms and recommendations for national laws and regulations that would help to prevent the illegal exploitation of natural resources and their contribution to conflicts. Among other elements, the Pakistan delegation would suggest the following:

One, an undertaking by all States to prevent the financing, directly or indirectly, of the illegal exploitation of natural resources;

Two, the adoption by States of national laws that would criminalize the willful provision or collection, by any means, directly or indirectly, of funds by their nationals, or in their territories, for the illegal exploitation of natural resources;

Three, action by States to freeze funds and other financial assets or economic resources of persons or entities which are identified as having participated in the illegal exploitation of natural resources;

Four, the establishment and maintenance of lists by the UN of individuals, entities and enterprises designated as being associated with the illegal exploitation of natural resources;

Five, an undertaking by governments to take effective action against all those individuals, groups, entities and enterprises involved in the illegal exploitation of natural resources.
Mr. President,

8. Beyond action by the Security Council, the United Nations and the international community can contribute to ending illegal exploitation by promoting national processing of natural resources and national control over the various stages of the value-addition and commercial process. For example, it is worth examining to what extent the diamond trade in Sierra Leone brings benefits to the government and the people of the country. Their share of the proceeds from diamond exploitation and trade should be just and equitable. Specific mechanisms should be developed for each specific natural resource, or group of resources – gold, diamonds, minerals, forests and oil – to enhance the national share in the legitimate exploitation and trade of such resources.

9. The Peace Building Commission can play a vital role in capacity building in the post-conflict situations which are referred to it. The ECOSOC and the General Assembly should promote similar measures to prevent the outbreak of conflicts by maximizing the benefits of natural resource exploitation to the countries which own them.

10. It is natural that the Security Council should be focused on the conflict situations in Africa. Yet, the international community will, very soon, need to focus on the equitable exploitation and use of two other vital resources – oil and water.

Mr. President,

11. Energy resources already are part of the strategic calculations of the major powers, almost all of whom are major importers of fossil fuels. Oil in particular has been the object and cause of major conflicts. Energy security is most desirable; not the least for developing countries. The UN needs to play a more active role to advance this objective in ways that is equitable for all consumers and producers. But, energy security should not emerge as a new cassus belli for the use of force or external aggression or intervention.

12. Similarly, in a world with an expanding population, spreading deserts and melting glaciers, access to water, which is often shared, is likely to emerge as an existential issue for many nations and peoples. It could become the cause of a host of disputes and conflicts. It is time for the international community to construct an international regime that ensures equitable access to and availability of water for all peoples and States.