

STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR S.R. INSANALLY, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GUYANA, CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77, IN THE PLENARY OF THE FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON AGENDA ITEM 37: IMPELEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Nes York, 6 October 1999

Mr. President,

In less than a year, the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives will be convened. Member States of the United Nations will then have the opportunity to assess the achievement of the goals set by the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and to propose further measures for its implementation. It will also be an occasion on which governments and the international community can recommit themselves to the enhancement of social development for the peoples of the world.

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I would like on this occasion to address the particular social development concerns of developing countries and the ways and means by which they may be addressed.

Mr. President, at the outset, let me say that in an age which has witnessed outstanding scientific and technological progress, it is disquieting to see the rising number of people living in abject poverty. The eradication of poverty remains the foremost challenge for the developing world where policy makers struggle, on a daily basis, to respond to the most basic needs of their population despite dwindling financial resources, disappointing economic growth rates and their countries' growing marginalisation in the world's economy. For too many countries, the target of halving poverty by the year 2015 has proved elusive and indeed, the President of the World Bank and the Managing Director of the IMF appear to have confirmed, at their recent meeting in Washington, that the goals which the international community had set itself for such important social services as health and housing will not be fulfilled.

In the light of this pessimistic projection, the G77 and China calls for a redoubled effort to arrest the rampant process of social degradation. We are convinced that people-centred development with an emphasis on poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration can lead to the improvement in the living conditions of the world's peoples. To be effective, however, poverty eradication strategies need to be holistic, multi-pronged and broad-based, paying particular attention to the needs of women and children who constitute the majority of the world's poorest. Equally important, they must promote and incorporate policies for universal access to basic and primary education, improved literacy, increased life expectancy, reduced infant and maternal mortality rates and the achievement of levels of health that lead to socially and economically productive lives. Poverty eradication strategies must also address the social ills of unemployment and underemployment.

The goal of full employment for poverty reduction cannot be overemphasized. The G77 reiterates its call for increased attention to be paid to employment expansion particularly for women, youth, the disabled and older persons. Recognising the important contribution of self-employment and the informal sector for the provision of employment opportunities, we would advocate initiatives that encourage such enterprise. As studies have clearly shown, such forms of employment are of particular significance in times of economic difficulties, including those attaching to structural adjustment programmes when retrenchment is widespread and investment in the social sector is generally reduced. The informal sector and micro-credit schemes have enabled the poor and vulnerable social groups to not only sustain themselves but to also participate in development, thereby reducing the potential for social unrest.

Mr. President, if nothing else, our experience since 1995 has taught us that the achievement of social development goals set in Copenhagen, will depend in large measure on sustained domestic economic growth and an enabling international environment. Developing countries need to be assured of a more level playing field for the marketing of their products and of more favourable and fairer terms of trade. At the forthcoming WTO Ministerial meeting in Seattle and at UNCTAD X in Bangkok, we must ensure that these needs are met.

Our high debt servicing bills also remain a serious impediment to our future development. Admittedly, there have been several commendable initiatives, the latest being the Cologne Initiative, which have effectively reduced the debt stock. Unfortunately, however, there are not nearly enough to relieve the burden faced by many developing countries. For the poorest of these, we must aim for debt cancellation which alone will provide the breathing space necessary for recovery. We would also again urge an immediate reversal of the declining trend of ODA from the agreed target of 0.7% of the GDP of donor countries and the creation of more incentives to encourage more capital flows and investments to developing countries.

As the financial crisis in Asia effectively demonstrated, globalisation and liberalisation of the world economy can be destructive, especially for weak economies. Sudden and widespread poverty, unemployment and homelessness can quickly sweep away decades of progress and economic development. It is worrying to note that concern with the reliability of the prevailing financial architecture which peaked at the time when the crisis was full blown, appears to have virtually dissipated. However, the situation has not changed fundamentally, it would be foolish to be lulled into complacency. There is still an urgent need for greater macro economic vigilance to protect developing countries from the uncontrolled consequences which globalisation has been known to bring.

Mr. President, in reviewing the Copenhagen commitments, we must be sensitive to the particular difficulties facing Africa, the LDCs and small economies generally as they seek to respond to the social needs of their population. The deteriorating external economic environment has made it extremely difficult for these countries to address the structural deficiencies which inhibit their productivity and economic growth. Many of them are moreover prone to natural and other disasters which severely sap their ability to address social needs.

Mr. President, the preparatory process for the Special Session thus far, has amply revealed the shortcomings in our efforts to reach the goals of the Social Summit. The G77 and China looks forward to the timely issuance of the reports requested of the United Nations system during the First Session of the Preparatory Committee since these can provide an even clearer assessment of the magnitude of the obstacles encountered. As with the national reports and studies done at the regional level, the recommendations offered therein could serve as a basis for active consideration by the Commission for Social Development when it meets next year. The Group is confident that the members of the bureau of Preparatory Committee and the United Nations Division of Social Policy and Development who have provided excellent leadership in our preparations, will ensure that the review process is a productive one.

At this time, I would also like to mention that the Group looks forward to the holding of the Special Session in Switzerland next year and to the facilities assured by the Government of Switzerland to ensure the representation and active participation of LDCs and other developing countries in the session.

In concluding, Mr. President, let me emphasize our view that to succeed, the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action requires a strong partnership amongst governments, civil society and the international community. All stakeholders should contribute actively to the implementation of the Summit's commitments since all have an interest in securing a socially stable world.

I thank you.

