

**Statement by Mr. George Talbot, Representative of Guyana, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, on agenda item 105: Implementation of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, before the Second Committee of the 54th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

**New York, 12 October 1999**

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Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China attaches the utmost importance to Agenda item 105, implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. Three years ago, the international community pledged this decade as the one in which the goal of eradicating absolute poverty and reducing overall poverty substantially in the world should be accomplished. Today, it is clear that this goal will not materialize if current trends persist.

In an era of unprecedented economic and technological progress, the number of people living in abject poverty continues to rise. At the beginning of the new millennium three billion people, half of the world, live on less than \$2 a day. 130 million children remain out of school, 1.5 billion people have no access to clean water. Two billion exist without access to sewage. Every day, over 800 million people eat less than enough or not at all. It is now estimated that the number of people living in extreme poverty, far from being halved, will instead rise disproportionately by 2015.

In an age of unparalleled wealth, the battle against poverty is being lost. The targets that define the multiple goals to be attained by the year 2015 thus appear beyond our reach. The World Bank's 1999 *World Development Indicators* projects that current trends will support neither the achievement of primary education targets nor the reduction of mortality rates for significant sectors of the world's population by the year 2015. Indications are also that the World Food Summit's goal of halving hunger and malnutrition by 2015, which was thought by many to be too modest, will also defy achievement. Infants, children and women are especially at risk.

While the challenge of poverty has grown, the response to it has been more rhetorical than real. Instead of rising to the challenge, ODA levels, but for a few exceptions, went down. Reliance on global market forces has led, not to shared prosperity, but to the reinforcement of prevailing biases and asymmetries against the poor and underprivileged. Furthermore, as the Secretary-General observes in his report, the efforts being expended to reduce global poverty have been severely constrained because of the slow-down in the world economy linked to the financial turmoil of the last two years.

Mr. Chairman,

Against this background, it is clear that the global consensus against poverty heralded at Copenhagen now needs to be reenergized by determined action at all levels global, regional and domestic. The United Nations, which led the way through the Social Summit, must once again take up the mantle of leadership and provide new direction to the global anti-poverty struggle. The forthcoming review of the Social Summit to be held in Geneva will be an occasion to advance new initiatives towards this end.

Action at the political and policy level must be coupled with concrete activities at the programme and operational level, if poverty eradication objectives are to be achieved. The integration of a gender perspective into such policies and strategies is essential to success. It is widely acknowledged that women are among those most susceptible to poverty and its effects. Their empowerment is key to any programme aimed at

poverty eradication. If the development process is to go beyond the rhetorical then it is essential that governments integrate women at every level in the anti-poverty struggle. All the indicators suggest that equal access to education have ramifications in improved health, living standards and decreased birth and mortality rates. Education, then, is key to the accomplishment of the eradication of poverty and economic progress.

The Group of 77 and China welcomes the various initiatives taken to address the challenge of poverty eradication. In this context, we acknowledge with appreciation the heightened emphasis placed on poverty reduction in the context of the enhanced HIPC initiative. We would, however, caution that this emphasis should not constitute a new conditionality but rather should be premised on a nationally owned approach to poverty eradication with full support at the international level.

Mr. Chairman,

Indeed much has been said about poverty eradication in the past and much will be said in the future. At this stage, however, it is the view of our Group that the Second Committee must be prepared to contemplate new, if not innovative, ideas as a contribution to the work of the United Nations in this area. The Committee may recommend that the Assembly considers the following:

§ Inviting Member States to consider action to reduce by half, or by an alternative percentage, as appropriate, by the year 2015, the proportion of people living in absolute poverty.

§ Inviting developed countries to consider increasing their ODA to 0.7% of GNP, as soon as possible but no later than the year 2015, as a demonstration of their commitment to poverty eradication.

§ Calling on the WTO to make development and the concerns of developing countries a central focus of the next round of trade negotiations to be launched at Seattle.

§ Reviewing, no later than by the fifth year of the current first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, the objectives of the Decade and progress achieved with a view to agreeing on a modified set of realistic and well defined objectives regarding action to reduce absolute poverty by the end of the Decade. The Secretary-General may be invited to submit focused proposals towards that end based on wide-ranging consultations.

§ Exploring the possibility of convening global hearings on poverty eradication, involving governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, multilateral financial and development institutions, regional institutions, with a view to determining a set of global initiatives against poverty to be undertaken during the first decade of the 21st century.

§ Examining ways and means of integrating poverty reduction objectives and targets into ongoing discussion on the global architecture, both financial and development.

§ Examining thoroughly the impact of globalization and interdependence on poverty eradication, particularly in view of the theme for the year 2000 of Globalization and Poverty Eradication.

Mr. Chairman,

The ideas put forward here will not in and of themselves solve the problem of poverty. However, it is the hope of the G-77 and China that they will serve to stimulate the further thinking of this Committee, and of the General Assembly, on ways and means of imparting a new dynamic to the fight against poverty.

I thank you.