

Statement delivered by H.E. Mr. I.B. Mohammed, Director, International Economic Cooperation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, on behalf of the Group of 77, on agenda item 99: Implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, in the Second Committee of the 55th UNGA

New York, 25 October 2000

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I have the honour to comment on Agenda Item 99, Implementation of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006). I wish to commend the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report, which has been useful in assessing the state of poverty.

Mr. Chairman,

Four years into the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, it has become necessary to review the progress made so far, and determine the prospects for the effective implementation of the Agenda for Combating Poverty. It is clear from all indications that there is a need to intensify efforts in the fight against poverty. This realization informed the various programme of action drawn up by the United Nations, the World Bank and the Organization of Economic Cooperation for Development (OECD) in cooperation with developing countries. Various goals have therefore been set through these programmes. These laudable goals include, inter alia: reduction by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by the year 2015; achieving universal primary education in all countries by 2015; making progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by year 2015; reducing by two-thirds the mortality rate of infants and children under five and three-quarters the mortality rate for mother of appropriate age by no later than 2015.

As indicated by the Secretary-General in his millennium report and the document before us, extreme poverty has continued to afflict over one-fifth of the world's population. Despite marginal success in the national and international campaign waged against poverty, the number of undernourished people in developing countries has continued to be on the rise. Although Latin America and the Caribbean countries achieved better economic record in the 1990s, the region has more people living below poverty line now than in 1980s. Despite the reduction of poverty in terms of population share, the absolute number of people living below poverty line has increased in South-East Asia, a region with revitalized economic growth in the 1990s.

Africa presents a pathetic picture. Virtually all economic and social indicators have declined. Life expectancy, infant mortality rate, illiteracy rate, per capita income, access to basic infrastructure and social services have all deteriorated. The increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to decimate the productive base of the population in that region. This is frightening, considering that the industrialized world, within this period, witnessed unprecedented economic growth and generation of unparalleled national wealth. The lack of effective international action has firmly elevated poverty as the greatest threat to peace and security at the dawn of the new Millennium. The Group of 77, indeed, views poverty as the single most pervasive violation of human and development rights.

Mr. Chairman,

The five year review and appraisal of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development revealed that overwhelming number of developing countries face intractable problems of poverty. It was generally acknowledged that continuing economic decline with steep inflation has thrown many people into the unemployment market and poverty, at a scale hitherto unseen in their economies. This finding was confirmed

by a recent World Bank publication, indicating that the number of people living on less than \$1 per day increased overall in all regions of developing countries.

The major impediments to the agenda for the eradication of poverty in developing countries, particularly in Africa and least developed countries, include lack of financial resources for development; worsening terms of trade; weak domestic infrastructure and social services; crushing debt overhang; illiteracy; unemployment and inefficient administrative system and increasing inequality in the distribution of income and welfare policies. These problems which have been in existence over decades, are compounded by the recent phenomena of globalization, propelled by new technologies, including information and communication technology as well as biotechnologies. And through global integration, the world economy has created tremendous benefits and opportunities which remain largely concentrated in a small number of countries in developed world. The developing countries are de-linked from this process because of their lack of capacity to take advantage of the potentials. Thus, globalization has come to mean great vulnerability to forces of globalization with unpredictable impact on their economies.

The task before the international community is how to spread the benefits of globalization in trade, investment and information flows that could open many opportunities to developing countries, to ensure effectiveness in their poverty eradication programmes. The inequalities between developed and developing countries require a great deal of efforts and genuine international cooperation. Currently, a fifth of the world's people living in the highest-income countries, account for 86 per cent of the world gross domestic product (GDP), 82 per cent of the world export market, 68 per cent of foreign direct investment (FDI) and 74 per cent of the world telephone lines. In contrast, the share of the bottom one fifth are no more than 1.5 per cent.

The international community must therefore live up to their responsibility of making the world a better place to live. The developed countries should fulfill their commitments in all United Nations Conferences and Summits of the past decades, including official development assistance (ODA). They should facilitate the flow of financial resources to developing countries, by creating a favourable international environment for investment. They must address the issue of external debt burden. The international financial system must be reformed to reduce the impact of excessive volatility of capital flows and improve transparency in the international financial system as well as widen the participation of the developing countries in decision-making of the international financial institutions.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the forthcoming Conferences on Least Developed Countries and Financing for Development in 2001 offer the international community the opportunity to redress the trend of increasing poverty, by adopting concrete measures that will assist the economic growth and social well-being of developing countries. This committee should therefore come up with innovative ideas and practical measures to support such strategy.

I thank you.