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later: Mr. Prendergast (Vice-Chairman) (Jamaica)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Statement by the President of the Economic and Social Council

1. **Mr. Somavia** (Chile), President of the Economic and Social Council, said that the work of the Council during 1998 had focused on the functioning of the Economic and Social Council system as a whole, pursuant to the process initiated by General Assembly resolution 50/227. First and foremost, real progress had been made in raising the profile and presence of the Council through a creative combination of good policy and sound, practical, effective management of its responsibilities under the Charter. Special emphasis had been placed on "management diplomacy" and on seeking to create a consensus-building atmosphere not in order to eliminate differences but in order to channel them into an efficient negotiating process, with key roles being played by the Vice-Presidents of the Council and by senior Secretariat officials.

2. In that connection, the fact that the Secretary-General had addressed the Council for the first time, setting out his vision of the Council's role and of its interaction with the United Nations system, was important. The full involvement of the Secretary-General had contributed in no small measure to the Council's successful initiatives to serve as a forum for the substantive policy dialogues held during the year. Of those, two stood out: the Council's special high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions on 18 April, when, for the first time, there had been a dialogue among ministers for foreign affairs, development cooperation and finance, and the high-level segment on market access at the Council's substantive session, which had highlighted the linkages between trade and development policies and had, for the first time, adopted a ministerial communiqué. At those meetings, the Council had demonstrated its comparative advantages vis-à-vis other bodies, not only by injecting the development dimension into issues such as trade and finance, but also by contributing to the recognition that it was not possible to pursue independent sectoral policies in dealing with integrated, multifaceted and systemic problems. Rather, it was necessary to progressively develop an integrated policy outlook which reflected the common objectives of the international community. It was also important to acknowledge that, while each organization of the multilateral system had its own mandate, in the field of ideas no one could claim exclusive rights or comparative advantages. It was a question of understanding the problems and proposing solutions.

3. The World Summit for Social Development had made it abundantly clear that the global economy needed a social support structure and that all societies needed to solve the problems of poverty, unemployment and social disintegration, and the Summit had agreed on a series of policy proposals to that end. However, it had taken a financial crisis to make Governments acknowledge that human suffering had grown exponentially and begin talking about a new world financial structure with a social foundation. Currently, no individual organization of the multilateral system had any chance of bringing stability to the worldwide economic and social situation. On the contrary, the time had come for intensive multilateral cooperation, beginning with coordination among the International Monetary Fund, which was responsible for financial and monetary stability, the United Nations Development Group and the World Bank, which dealt with development issues, especially in Africa and the least developed countries, the World Trade Organization, which was responsible for keeping trade open for all, and the specialized agencies, which attended to the social foundation of work, education, health and food.

4. The Council could take up core economic issues of that kind without duplicating the work carried out elsewhere or getting bogged down in technical details. The General Assembly's high-level dialogue on the social and economic impact of globalization and interdependence, held in September, had confirmed the political relevance of the Economic and Social Council as a forum for exploring those issues further. Equally, by managing its own processes well, the Council had been able to reinforce its coordinating role and to enhance its function of managing and guiding its subsidiary bodies, something which it had not been able to do until 1995, when agreed conclusions had been adopted. That process had culminated in the Council's May 1998 special meeting on integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits. The Council did not intend to dictate to its subsidiary bodies or in any way impede their work, but simply to help them work together rather than in relative isolation, in particular with respect to the follow-up to conferences. In that connection, it should be pointed out that, for the first time, all chairpersons of the functional commissions had met with the Bureau of the Council. One member of the Bureau, Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, had been particularly active over the past 16 months in negotiating the resolutions adopted by the Council concerning General Assembly resolutions 50/227 and 52/12 B on reform. Thanks to his untiring efforts, the Council had, for the first time, decided to decrease the number of members of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development from 53 to 33, to

combine the mandates of two subsidiary bodies into one new entity, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development, and to agree on a set of specific recommendations regarding the working methods of the functional commissions. It had also conducted an in-depth review of the regional commissions, welcomed the reform measures undertaken by them and highlighted their role as regional outposts of the United Nations. For the first time, the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions had participated in the Council's work on two occasions, and the relationship between the Council and the commissions had clearly been strengthened.

5. If the Economic and Social Council system, working under the direction of the General Assembly and addressing its political priorities, were to become capable of acting as a whole, transforming the functional commissions from isolated sectoral outposts into integrated, mutually reinforcing parts, the Council's report to the General Assembly would present an overview of the ideas and proposals stemming from all discussions with the Economic and Social Council system. It would be an integrated document that could be of enormous help to the decisions of the General Assembly and would put forward new ideas, proposals and initiatives. Reports to the Council would include thorough analyses of the problems encountered and lessons learned, as well as specific indications of problems and opportunities and of areas in which the Council could provide cross-sectoral coordination and overall guidance on a system-wide basis.

6. For the first time, the Council had held a humanitarian affairs segment on the theme "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian activities of the United Nations system", which had culminated in the adoption of agreed conclusions. Also for the first time, a statement of programme budget implications had been submitted which showed that the Council's decisions on reform of its machinery would save money for the Organization.

7. Despite the success of the segments which he had mentioned, the Council's general segment still left much to be desired. The variety of subjects made coherent discussion very difficult and it was almost impossible to properly prepare and digest the mass of documentation involved. The Council's coordinating role vis-à-vis the specialized agencies also required further attention, and ways must be found to engage the United Nations system more actively in the Council's processes and to promote a better dialogue between the Council and the specialized agencies, not only at the secretariat level but also at the intergovernmental level.

8. Lastly, the Council's relationship with the General Assembly needed to be defined more clearly. That could be

done by modifying the Council's report to the General Assembly to make it clear what guidance the Council expected from the Assembly. The fragmented manner in which the report was currently considered by the Assembly must also be changed. In theory, there was a clear distinction between the coordination role of the Council and the policy-making role of the Assembly, but in practice that distinction was less clear. Better dovetailing of the work of the two bodies would be an important step in the right direction. One solution might be for the chairmen of the Second and Third Committees to be ex officio members of the Bureau of the Council, and for one Vice-President of the Council to be an ex officio member of the bureaux of the Second and Third Committees, thereby creating some sort of structural linkage.

9. Although the Council had come a long way in improving its work, much remained to be done. All partners — Member States, the Secretariat, the specialized agencies and the subsidiary bodies of the Council — must work together under the overall policy guidance of the General Assembly.

Statement by the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs

10. **Mr. Civili** (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs) made an introductory statement on the main themes the Committee would study, and highlighted the links between the work of the Economic and Social Council and the agenda of the Second Committee. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs welcomed the work that had been carried out in collaboration with Mr. Somavía, which had been remarkable for its progress, innovation and teamwork.

11. He pointed out that new and stronger partnerships were being established between the Administrative Committee on Coordination, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, and recognized that the Council's achievements over the year were largely attributable to Mr. Somavía's organizational abilities. He gave as an example of those inter-agency links the special high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council on 18 April 1998 and the Ministerial communiqué on market access approved by the Council at its high-level segment, which had influenced the General Assembly at its high-level meeting on renewing the development dialogue. Also, the Council's work in the financial and trade areas was relevant to the Committee's debate on macroeconomic and trade and development issues. The Council's Ministerial communiqué was also important in ensuring that the forthcoming trade negotiations within the World Trade Organization (WTO) took place in a constructive atmosphere. The Second Committee's deliberations on financial integration and on financing for

development, and the draft resolutions in that area currently under negotiation were based on the Council's work. Thanks to the constructive spirit in which the Council had carried out its work in 1998, the Committee would be able once again to show that the United Nations could make an important contribution to integrating financial, trade and development concerns in such a way that the development dialogue benefited all parties, particularly the developing countries.

12. Over the previous three years, the Economic and Social Council had also devoted special attention to promoting a coordinated approach to the follow-up to major global conferences. The Council's special session in May 1998 had been in many ways the culmination of a process at a moment when the Second and Third Committees were to undertake the five-year reviews of the Beijing Conference and the Copenhagen Summit. Also, the special meeting which the Council was to hold in the spring of 1999 on the issue of indicators would help advance the all-important objective of promoting coordination of conference follow-up processes at the country level.

13. The Economic and Social Council had played a key role in assisting the General Assembly in the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development. At its 1998 substantive session, the Council had adopted a resolution that provided substantive guidance on mainstreaming the gender perspective in operational activities at the country level. The Council's decision to refine the reporting arrangements of the executive boards was a significant step in reinforcing its overall guidance role on issues that cut across the work of the various funds and programmes. Concerning coordinated follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, he said that the Council's approval of agreed conclusions on such a politically complex issue as human rights would facilitate the work of the Third Committee at its current session.

14. Concerning the Organization's humanitarian activities, he believed that the new humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council would improve the governance of those activities, reinforce the General Assembly's peace-building role and influence the Organization's political, economic and social missions.

15. In addition to the Organization's achievements so far, he pointed out that, as the experience of the Council's work in 1998 had shown, if meetings were properly prepared for and organized, and if they focused constructively on issues of relevance to Member States, the United Nations was capable of producing solutions for some of the most urgent and difficult problems facing the international community.

16. He pointed to the progress made in reforming and revitalizing the Economic and Social Council. The Council would have an opportunity to make further progress when it addressed, at its resumed session, the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/227 and the harmonization of the work of its functional commissions.

Agenda item 98: Implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty

(1997–2006) (*continued*) (A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/95–S/1998/311, A/53/223 And Add 1, A/53/329)

17. **Mr. Al-Dailmi** (Yemen) said that the implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997–2006) had become all the more important at that moment because of the global financial crisis and the changes taking place worldwide as a result of global interdependence and the global partnership for development. Eradicating poverty was the most important problem that had to be solved at the dawn of the twenty-first century; it was to be hoped that the reform measures announced by the Secretary-General in 1997, which were currently being implemented by the United Nations, would be a step in the right direction, would form a framework for cooperation between the organs and organizations of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, and would inspire countries to take their own, individual measures to eradicate poverty and its worst manifestations in the decades to come.

18. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (A/53/329) highlighted the continued perception that while globalization was a powerful force leading to new opportunities and challenges and had benefited many countries and people, for others it had brought further marginalization. It was therefore important to support the poorest developing countries and help them develop new capacity, integrate themselves into the global economy and take advantage of the opportunities globalization brought. A necessary condition for eradicating poverty was to establish solid partnerships between the developed and the developing countries. A vital step in that regard was the economic well-being and poverty reduction proposal contained in the Development Partnerships Strategy of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), with the specific goal of halving the number of people living in extreme poverty in the developing countries by 2015.

19. Microcredit programmes had proved to be an effective tool for promoting growth and freeing people from poverty.

With the decline in official development assistance, microfinance institutions had used innovative strategies to reach the poorest of the poor. The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action were also a valid complement to United Nations action to eradicate poverty.

20. Despite being a least developed country, Yemen was engaged in numerous economic restructuring efforts designed to put an end to poverty and to improve its citizens' standard of living. However, it was confronted with many economic problems as a result of various factors which were affecting the development infrastructure, including the regional, subregional and international economic situation. It therefore attached great importance to international action and considered it essential to receive more help in eradicating poverty.

21. **Mr. Deguene Ka** (Senegal) noted with interest the Secretary General's report on the role of microcredit in the eradication of poverty (A/53/223) and said that the analysis and recommendations in the report warranted very careful consideration. Poverty was undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges facing humankind on the threshold of the third millennium. The holding of the World Summit for Social Development and the proclamation of the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty were clear reflections of that concern.

22. Long before the advent of globalization, poverty had already emerged, to varying degrees, as a truly global problem affecting all countries, North and South. At a time when humankind had the means to achieve unprecedented prosperity, it was ironic and unacceptable that hunger, disease, malnutrition and illiteracy should be undermining the living conditions of over a quarter of the world's population. If that tragic situation persisted, the very foundations of international peace and security would be at risk. All States were responsible for creating and maintaining conditions conducive to the economic and social progress of peoples. Accordingly, his country had always given priority to national action to combat poverty, particularly through job creation and support for small income-generating projects.

23. His Government's policy of social integration was promoting autonomy among the most vulnerable sectors of Senegalese society through the creation of economic interest groups, which were private legal entities modelled on small and medium-sized businesses and enjoying generous tax benefits.

24. His Government, while continuing to promote structural adjustment, was fully aware of the human dimension of macroeconomic reforms and their impact on the provision of basic social services. Accordingly, with support from the

World Bank and the World Food Programme, it had established a community nutrition programme which was a new step in efforts to combat malnutrition. The programme had proved successful in its experimental phase and was currently funding some 200 microenterprises. It also generated income through the processing and marketing of local produce, and grass-roots communities were able to administer it directly.

25. His delegation emphasized the role of traditional values in alleviating poverty. Such ethical and moral elements were not usually taken into account in economic mechanisms, but they were a last line of defence against the breakdown of society. That moral dimension should be fostered, for ultimately it provided a safety net against social exclusion and marginalization.

26. At the meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity, held in Harare in June 1997, his Government had secured the adoption of a decision on microcredit in an effort to make African countries aware of the opportunities which that system offered to the poorest groups in society, especially rural women. However, internal measures to combat poverty would not have any real impact as long as the situation within countries, especially developing countries, continued to be overshadowed by an unfavourable international situation. Such internal initiatives should therefore be matched by an international plan for creating an enabling environment for economic growth and sustainable development. In that connection, it was particularly important to take urgent, vigorous action to increase developing countries' export earnings, find a lasting solution to the debt problem, mobilize resources to support the "20/20 initiative" and give renewed impetus to official development assistance.

27. **Ms. Sibal** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that the aim pursued by UNESCO within the framework of its Medium-Term Strategy (1996–2001) was to contribute, through action in its fields of competence, to the attainment of the two objectives common to the United Nations system as a whole, namely, development and peace. UNESCO was contributing, through its fields of competence, to the central objective of the United Nations system, which was development for peace, in justice and equity, and for social progress, a better standard of living and greater freedom for all. That involved the elimination of poverty and more equitable sharing of prosperity and knowledge.

28. While the question of poverty must be dealt with primarily as a violation of human rights and of the right to development, the measures to be taken for its eradication

required integrated approaches encompassing its economic, social, cultural, educational, demographic and other dimensions. The integrated, intersectoral approach taken by UNESCO involved going beyond policies and measures which addressed certain symptoms of poverty sectorally and, instead, proposing action to target the root causes of poverty, whether they had their origins, internationally or nationally, in economic, social, cultural or political structures. UNESCO policy was guided by the principle that development could be promoted through macroeconomic and microeconomic strategies and through multisectoral social development programmes for improved health, education, literacy, shelter, family planning, population and gender equality. Poverty must be addressed in all its dimensions, not just that of income. A people-centred strategy for eradicating poverty should start by building the assets of the poor; in that field, an integrated approach and an inter-agency task force were more than needed.

29. According to distinguished economist and Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen, a shortage of food was not the main explanation for famine. UNESCO approached development and poverty eradication from that standpoint. It saw a strong link among peace-building in a democratic framework, development and economic growth and believed that the economic security of individual citizens was a basic component of the culture of peace. One area of poverty eradication and promotion of social development was human resources development and capacity-building, which included formal and non-formal education and training, particularly for girls and women in poorer areas, and training in skills that would enable them to generate income and participate in society as fully fledged citizens. Efforts to combat the feminization of poverty, especially through basic education, would have a positive impact on the family and on society.

30. At another level, capacity-building involved improving countries' institutional and administrative structures, in other words, helping them to implement anti-poverty strategies more effectively, improving endogenous policy-making skills and training researchers in the social sciences and technology.

31. To UNESCO, culture was a basic variable in the analysis of poverty; emphasis was laid, therefore, on the non-economic sources of poverty, such as ethnic conflict and discrimination. UNESCO also believed that democratic governance was a very important factor in fostering the participation of the poor in development-related policy-making, access to basic social services, sustainable livelihoods and productive activities. In that framework, the State played a central role, in cooperation with civil society and economic agents, in counter-balancing the adverse effects

on the poor of structural adjustment and macroeconomic policies.

32. **Mr. Azaiez** (Tunisia), after endorsing the statement made by Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, recalled that eradicating poverty had been the primary objective of all the major United Nations conferences held since 1990; it was also, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997–2006)(A/53/329), the primary challenge facing the international community at the eve of the twenty-first century.

33. Poverty was a phenomenon whose complexity and multidimensional nature required the mobilization of all agents in society. Mention should be made first of all of international cooperation for the eradication of poverty in the current context of globalization and expansion of trade. With regard to the relationship between poverty and world trade, there were many remaining tariff and non-tariff barriers, in addition to tariff peaks and tariff escalation, which had an adverse impact on developing country exports and which should receive priority attention in future multilateral trade negotiations.

34. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General referred to above, to enable the developing countries to integrate better into the global economy, debt relief, additional and well-targeted resources, access to markets and information and technology were crucial. The holding in 2000 of the special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up of the World Summit for Social Development would provide an opportunity to evaluate the progress made in reducing poverty in the framework of international cooperation.

35. As stated by the Secretary-General in his report, the United Nations reforms announced in 1997 provided a framework for collaborative action by the different organs and bodies of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, which could support and encourage country-by-country efforts to accelerate poverty reduction. His delegation expressed its appreciation for the Statement of Commitment for Action to Eradicate Poverty, adopted by the executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, in May 1998.

36. The growing number of poverty reduction efforts by the organizations of the United Nations system was undoubtedly a decisive element in ensuring the success of the programme for the Decade, but it also required that the relevant work programmes be harmonized in order to achieve the necessary coherence among policies in the field in all areas of United Nations activity, especially health care, education and the

fight against hunger and malnutrition. In that respect, his delegation welcomed the establishment of local coordinating committees in which United Nations officials and national representatives participated.

37. As far as his country was concerned, the efforts to reduce poverty and ensure social peace had been based on the plans of action formulated at the major United Nations conferences, and were aimed at achieving a form of development which reconciled growth and environmental protection, while ensuring a decent minimum income and the exercise of basic human rights for all citizens. In that context, the National Solidarity Fund carried out activities for the benefit of remote rural areas, in accordance with the principles laid down in the development plans.

38. Moreover, his Government had established a more ambitious national development programme for the period 1995–1999, and to that end had created a National Solidarity Bank. That institution, which funded projects ineligible for loans from the traditional banking system, was based on criteria relating to the viability of projects, wealth creation and the development of the entrepreneurial spirit. Thanks to the human dimension of its policies, his country had been able to place the economically weak categories at the centre of its concerns and to maintain sustained and balanced growth in the social arena and in the framework of regional development.

39. *Mr. Prendergast (Jamaica), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

40. **Mr. Ouane** (Mali), after fully endorsing the statement made by Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that all sustainable development should be based first of all on domestic efforts. To that end his country had, with the help of its partners in development, established a national poverty reduction strategy, which was, as noted by President Konare, aimed at strengthening the programmes affording access to social services for as many people as possible.

41. In that context, his Government had taken steps to promote income-generating activities and self-employment by establishing labour-intensive public works programmes, especially in the most disadvantaged areas; developing agricultural activities, in which the most disadvantaged population groups were concentrated, and improving agricultural yields; improving access to financial services and other factors of production through the development of micro-credit throughout the country, with priority being given to the most disadvantaged areas; and establishing a transparent land management framework and improving access to agricultural machinery.

42. His Government had also taken steps to improve access to education by building primary schools at a distance of no more than five kilometres from villages in poor areas; promoting access to health care, nutrition, safe drinking water and sanitation through policies relating to basic medicines and their availability in disadvantaged areas, the building of community health centres, the improvement of the health and nutritional status of women and children, and so on; and improving housing by promoting construction methods which utilized durable and low-cost local materials.

43. His country had formulated and carried out sectoral projects, such as the educational programme for the decade, the social development and health programme for the decade, the justice programme for the decade, the first investment programme in the population field, the plan of action for the promotion of women, the national plan of action for the monitoring, development and protection of children, the plan of action for rural development and the national plan of action on the environment.

44. One of the central aspects of the national poverty reduction strategy in his country was citizen participation in the design, implementation and follow-up of the initiatives affecting them; in that context, the decentralized communities were strategic tools for implementing and coordinating the strategy with the help of non-governmental organizations.

45. The implementation of the national poverty reduction strategy in his country would require \$372.8 million, or 223.7 billion CFA francs; 20 per cent of that sum would be provided by the State, territorial communities, grass-roots community organizations and local non-governmental organizations. At the initiative of his Government, a round-table discussion had been held in Geneva from 15 to 17 September 1998, at which Mali's development partners had pledged contributions totalling \$686 million for the period 1998–2002.

46. **Mr. Guillén** (Peru) noted his country's successes in the area of poverty eradication, including a reduction of the overall poverty index from 54 to 44 per cent, and of the index of extreme poverty from 22 to 18 per cent in 1990. The goal was to reduce extreme poverty by 50 per cent by the year 2000, leaving less than 10 per cent of the population in that category. Moreover, Peru devoted 40 per cent of its budget, or 20 per cent more than the level called for at the Copenhagen Conference, to basic social services.

47. Peru noted with interest the report of the Secretary-General on the role of microcredit in the eradication of poverty (A/53/223). Microcredit was a tool of fundamental importance, since it was available to women, available, in other words, to those who had to feed the family, raise the children and manage scarce family resources. While it was

true that financial mediation systems were needed, and that economic activity implied a certain degree of commercial activity, it should nevertheless be remembered that microcredit functioned at the level of the individual household, existed in a natural form and was not intended to transform poor women into economic agents like their counterparts in developed countries.

48. Peru welcomed the statement made by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs in introducing the report contained in document A/53/223, and urged the Department of Public Information of the United Nations to publicize those important clarifications in order to impart the proper balance to the information to be used in the follow-up to the World Summit on Social Development.

49. **Ms. Oh Young-ju** (Republic of Korea) said that poverty eradication had become a fundamental goal of international development efforts, and that the launching of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty had provided guidance for combating poverty in a more systematic way at both the national and the international level. By reviewing the progress as well as the setbacks in implementing commitments for the Decade, the international community would have a better chance to explore new and improved ways and means to achieve its goals. Although statistics showed progress in eliminating poverty in several parts of the world, vast segments of humanity still were unable to meet their basic needs.

50. To attain real progress, each country first had to make poverty eradication one of the most important objectives of economic growth and social service policies. The many ethical, social and economic aspects of poverty must be fully integrated in the establishment of national poverty eradication strategies. The continuous efforts to devise such strategies must foster equitable development, because failure to promote the well-being of all social groups would lead to social distortions and instability.

51. Secondly, the international community should continue to support the efforts of individual countries by finding additional funding resources. Developing countries, and especially the least developed countries, could have access to more resources to combat poverty if their external debt burdens were reduced. The Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt initiative merited support, and an increasing number of those countries could be expected to benefit from the initiative if the international community provided more resources. The international economic environment also partially determined what developing countries could do to fight poverty. In the accelerating process of globalization, some among them had found themselves marginalized and

unable to benefit from the general trend; the current financial crisis had also demonstrated that the economic problems of one region could easily spread to other regions.

52. Thirdly, with multilateral organizations pursuing poverty eradication as a sustainable development strategy, better coordination of intergovernmental activities at the policy and operational levels was all the more indispensable. Coordinating the efforts of the agencies of the United Nations system with those of other intergovernmental organizations to generate synergy among them was also crucial.

53. It was also important for those sectors mired in poverty, of which women constituted the majority, to have adequate access to basic financial resources, and microcredit programmes were excellent examples of concrete measures to provide such access.

54. The year's special theme of "Poverty, Human Rights and Development" implied that poverty constituted a great threat to human rights. Its eradication was achievable if the collective political will existed to eradicate it. It was to be hoped that a strong global partnership to eradicate poverty would be forged during the first United Nations Decade.

55. **Mr. Kaba** (Guinea) said that his delegation supported the statement regarding item 98 made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

56. In resolutely dedicating itself to the consideration of a large number of important and complex problems, the United Nations, thanks to patient and at times arduous discussion, had succeeded in achieving a consensus on the question of the eradication of poverty and in recognizing the need for a collective response to the challenges presented by poverty. The Organization had thus contributed to a greater understanding of the specific dimensions and priorities of the question of eliminating poverty.

57. The publication by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) of its *Human Development Report 1992* had led his Government to completely rethink its human development and anti-poverty policies. In cooperation with the United Nations system, the Canadian International Development Agency and the Bretton Woods institutions, his Government had initiated a general strategy for development over the medium and long term known as "Guinée Vision 2010", which was based on the principle of sustainable human development. With the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank, the Government had formulated a medium-term support strategy and framework for expenditures that addressed four major sectors: education, health, sustainable development and public works.

58. The adoption of the national human-development programme in 1997 and the mobilization of the resources of the organizations working together on the ground to put it into effect represented an important achievement in the Government's efforts to combat poverty and in its cooperation with the agencies of the United Nations system.

59. As part of the national programme, the Government had established five major programmes to foster economic and social development. Three of those programmes, aimed at the eradication of poverty, dealt with gender and development, the private sector, and small and medium-sized enterprises and microenterprises. The framework had allowed the completion of many basic-services projects in the areas of education, health, family planning and the 20/20 Initiative. The social and economic infrastructure for poverty reduction had been established thanks to a participatory programme of support for grass-roots initiatives and microcredit. Significant advances in human development had been achieved since 1992 with the assistance of the international community in general and with the coordinated support of the United Nations system. Those advances would not have been possible without that collective dynamic, strongly promoted by the team of the United Nations system's Resident Coordinator and the participation of the specialized agencies providing services on the ground. His Government expressed sincere appreciation for the efforts of the United Nations system as a whole and of UNDP in particular, as well as for the work of all those who were taking part in the social and economic development of the country.

60. **Mr. Al-Banai** (Kuwait) said that he supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Despite the global economic growth, technological progress and improved standards of living witnessed in the last decade, the world was confronted, at the threshold of the twenty-first century, with a human tragedy: one fifth of its population lived in poverty. The fact that poverty eradication had become a central issue at major conferences and global summits indicated the interest which that tragedy awakened throughout the world.

61. The challenge of eradicating poverty and guaranteeing sustainable development in the twenty-first century would fall to the youth of the current time. Kuwait therefore considered that investment in education was a priority. All citizens of Kuwait had the right to education free of charge from the level of child care to that of university. Courses for the elderly and programmes to eliminate illiteracy were also offered.

62. Since the country's attainment of independence in 1971, the people and Government of Kuwait had demonstrated their unshakable determination to eliminate poverty and alleviate

suffering in the rest of the world. Accordingly, on 31 December 1961, the Arab Fund for Economic Development had been set up with a capital of more than \$6.6 billion, for the purpose of fostering the economic growth of Arab countries and developing countries by granting technical assistance credits in the areas of development, technology and medicine. The Fund also participated in various Arab development agencies at the regional and international levels.

63. As had been noted in a 1990 International Monetary Fund report, the total amount of development assistance provided by Kuwait to nearly every country in the world between 1973 and 1990 had reached \$18.6 billion. Despite the destruction of economic infrastructure as a result of the Iraqi invasion, Kuwait had recovered and would continue to fulfil its duty to assist those in need. That was evidenced by the fact that credits from the Fund had been extended to countries in Central, West and South-East Africa; the Pacific; Central, South and East Asia; Central Europe; and Latin America and the Caribbean.

64. Kuwait made an urgent appeal to the peoples and States of the developed world and to all donors to take earnest and prompt action to devise solutions to the serious problem of poverty. It was grateful to the developed countries, particularly Norway, for the initiatives they had taken individually to reduce the debt of the poorest and most heavily indebted countries. It urged other developed countries to honour their commitments, and stressed that the need to renew the collective will to put an end to poverty had never been greater. If all sectors united their efforts to fight poverty at the governmental and intergovernmental levels, and if support was provided to the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations and other international organizations, it would be possible to attain the noble objectives of the United Nations.

65. **Ms. Taddei** (San Marino) said that San Marino, as a small country that only in recent decades had experienced a significant improvement in its standard of living, had always been sensitive to the issue of poverty eradication. That issue had been a major concern of the United Nations since its establishment. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control".

66. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development had reaffirmed the universal and inalienable nature of all

human rights, including the right to development, and had stressed the need to respect, protect and observe them. The United Nations reform programme provided a framework for collaborative action by the various bodies and agencies of the system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, to support country-level efforts to accelerate poverty eradication and to eliminate the worst aspects of poverty in the next two decades.

67. Significant progress had been made in some parts of the world. For example, East Asia had achieved remarkable development, and absolute poverty had been reduced by about 40 per cent. However, the recent financial crises had slowed that process in the region and had dragged millions of people back into poverty.

68. Poverty levels were still alarmingly high in some parts of the world. According to the *Human Development Report 1997*, poverty affected nearly 45 per cent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa. Poverty stemmed from economic stagnation, slow employment growth, widening income disparities, marginalization from global trade and financial flows, natural resource degradation and the consequences of violent conflicts.

69. The increasing feminization of poverty must also be taken into account. Although women played a key role in the African economy, accounting for 60 per cent of output in the informal sector and 70 per cent in the agricultural sector, they still did not have sufficient access to material factors of production or to services.

70. It was necessary to encourage the latent entrepreneurial capacity of poor sectors. That was the aim of microcredit initiatives, under which relatively small loans, usually amounting to a few hundred dollars, were provided to individuals, particularly women, to enable them to set up small-scale enterprises in the areas of agriculture, distribution, trade, handicrafts and small-scale processing. Even though interest rates were relatively high in many developing countries, most microcredit institutions reported a high rate of repayment.

71. **Mr. Kunda** (Zambia) said that his delegation aligned itself with the statement made under agenda item 98 by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. At the approach of the new millennium, it was disheartening to note that, despite the significant economic growth achieved over the years, poverty remained the number one enemy of the majority of mankind. In many developing countries, particularly the least developed, poverty had reached unprecedented levels. The *Human Development Report* estimated that some 1.3 billion people lived on less than one dollar a day, one billion were illiterate, more than

one billion had no access to safe water and one third of the population of the least developed countries was not expected to live beyond the age of 40.

72. The primary victims of poverty and social discrimination were women. Of the 1.5 billion people living in poverty, the majority were women, particularly those living in rural areas of the developing world. Women had the least access to the means of production, received the lowest wages and were least knowledgeable about modern technology for improving agricultural productivity. They also had the least access to education and health care. Women's empowerment must therefore be part of every country's poverty eradication strategy.

73. Mass poverty resulted from factors such as a shortage of productive resources, limited access to basic services and poor output and lack of diversification in the agricultural sector. Those factors eroded the economic and social fabric of populations and drastically reduced the options of poor sectors. That situation was exacerbated by the effects of structural adjustment programmes and, more recently, by the spread of the effects of the Asian financial crisis. At the national level, the causes of poverty in many developing countries included inadequate national economic policies, the insufficiency or lack of a natural resource base and external economic shocks such as external debt, unfavourable terms of trade and reduced official development assistance.

74. Democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms were interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Widespread absolute poverty inhibited the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, weakened popular participation and democracy and stripped people of their human dignity. It was gratifying to know that it had been reaffirmed that the right to development was also a universal and inalienable human right. The special theme entitled, "poverty, human rights and development", which had been selected for the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, underscored the inextricable link that existed between the eradication of poverty and the promotion of human rights.

75. The eradication of poverty was an ethical, social, political and economic imperative which could be achieved only through the adoption of a multidimensional and integrated approach. It would require the support of the international community in order, *inter alia* to promote full employment as a basic priority of economic and social policies and to encourage the formulation of policies and strategies, at the national and regional level, that would meet the basic needs of the people, strengthen their productive capacities and empower them to participate in

decision-making. In order for developing countries to create an environment that would make it possible for everyone to attain quality education, a high standard of health and access to safe water the international community should support all the efforts currently being made by providing additional resources, enhancing debt reduction mechanisms, improving terms of trade and increasing the flow of foreign direct investment.

76. The role of microcredit in improving the livelihood of small urban and rural producers should be supported further by international and regional financial institutions and donor agencies. Given that micro-credit programmes had proved to be an effective tool in the elimination of poverty, they should be extended to other developing countries rather than being confined to a few selected countries. In that connection his delegation welcomed the creation by the World Bank of the Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest which would coordinate international micro-credit efforts.

77. His delegation looked forward with interest to the special session of the General Assembly to be held in the year 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development. It hoped that the international community would have an opportunity to recommend concrete actions that would take into account the changed international economic environment so that the developing countries, particularly the least developed could fully and effectively implement the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit.

78. **Ms. Gordon** (Jamaica) said that she fully supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and noted that the issue of poverty had been promoted to a central position in the policies of most governments and actors in the international community, including the United Nations system. It was fifty years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had been adopted and five years since the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme, of Action, yet millions of people still did not enjoy some of the most basic economic and social rights. Her Government was cognizant of the fact that poverty was a complex problem which required a combination of interventions in different areas. Jamaica's human resources development programme, which focused on policy reforms in the areas of education and health, represented the strongest expression of the Government's intention to alleviate poverty through investment in human capital. In keeping with the commitments made at Copenhagen, her Government was applying an integrated approach comprising a mix of projects relating to *inter alia* employment creation, income generation and health services and involving all major stake-holders, the key partners being communities and community-based

organizations, including non-governmental organizations, private and voluntary organizations and the private sector. The national poverty eradication programme which had been adopted in 1996 had been developed in consultation with those groupings, as well as with academia, the political opposition, the church and other community groups, clearly demonstrating that the Government understood that harmonization and coordination, particularly at the country level, were critical to the successful implementation of poverty eradication strategies.

79. As to the role of microcredit, she said that the need to incorporate the informal sector must be recognized. Small businesses had the potential to create jobs, utilize local raw materials and scientific and technological expertise and involve large numbers of people in national decision-making and economic and social development. The small business sector in Jamaica had yet to realize its potential. There was a need for a coherent set of legislation and programmes in the Caribbean region to strengthen participation in that sector through objectives such as developing appropriate legal, administrative and financial structures; increasing the participation of women and youth in small business ventures and improving the competitiveness of small farmers; initiating and strengthening financing mechanisms which enhanced small business sector access to financial services and reduced the cost of such services. In that connection, her delegation agreed with the conclusions and suggestions contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the role of microcredit in the eradication of poverty (A/53/223), including the need for microcredit schemes to incorporate a culture of saving and to link savings and loans. There was an informal banking sector in Jamaica, known as the "pardner" system which was essentially a system of savings and loan arrangements among groups of people, mainly women, who systematically pooled their meagre resources enabling participants to afford major purchases, obtain loans and deal with unforeseen crises.

80. Clearly there was a limit to what microcredit could do in eradicating poverty. However, better education, health and other services would enhance efficiency, productivity and economic opportunities for beneficiaries of microfinance programmes. If countries took a holistic approach to poverty eradication and highlighted microcredit and microenterprise as important components, they would enhance the sustainability of those schemes and reduce the risk of their becoming mere welfare schemes.

81. All those measures would not succeed without comparable action at the international level. She drew attention to the recent work of the Administrative Committee on Coordination in the area of coordination and harmonization within the United Nations system and to the collaboration

already taking place between the funds and programmes, the specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions. National poverty eradication measures were often stymied by developments in the external environment. The problem of external debt and debt servicing prevented many countries from reaping the benefits of globalization and liberalization. Moreover, those processes had widened the rifts in the social strata, particularly between rich and poor.

82. In that second year of the first Decade for Poverty Eradication much remained to be done. While steps were taken to reduce poverty, other steps continued to be taken that undermined any progress made in that area; people continued to degrade the environment and basic social services had been greatly reduced as a consequence of the structural adjustment programmes; that had led to a deterioration of educational and health programmes. Perhaps it would take a global crisis to force all players in the international community to purposefully act to address the inequalities among nations and peoples of the world. For that reason she commended the work of the United Nations and other international agencies which continued to forge partnerships with governments such as her own in order to combat poverty and promote social development. She also commended those donor governments — new and traditional — which had not only maintained but had managed to increase their official development assistance as a percentage of their countries gross domestic product.

83. **Ms. Raholinirina** (Madagascar) said that consideration of the item relating to poverty was particularly important, given the downturn in the global economy and the reduction in official development assistance, factors which hindered progress towards the eradication of poverty. Despite the fact that in 1995, during the World Summit for Social Development, 186 countries had made a commitment to the eradication of absolute poverty and the formulation of specific plans and objectives to that end, poverty continued to affect a large part of the global population. The 1998 United Nations Development Programme report on poverty stated that approximately one third of the population of developing countries was still cash poor, with a daily income of less than one dollar; 30 per cent of children under five years old suffered from malnutrition and 38 per cent of adult women were illiterate.

84. Although progress had been made in these areas in some countries, that was not sufficient if poverty were to be eradicated in the most disadvantaged countries. The gap between rich and poor countries continued to widen, while at the same time the unbelievable contrast between the wealth of some individuals and the paltry income of the population had increased. It was well known that poverty was most prevalent in Africa, where 30 per cent of the population had

a life expectancy of less than 40 years, more than half the women were illiterate and more than 30 per cent of children had to leave school before fifth grade. In view of such alarming statistics, Madagascar agreed with the five priority areas for economic development in Africa set out by the Development Assistance Committee.

85. Madagascar had made the fight against poverty its main economic objective, aiming to achieve strong and sustainable economic growth that would significantly reduce poverty. A variety of measures had been taken at the national level, including the preparation of a budget compatible with the resources available to the State, the alleviation of the tax burden, the provision of incentives in order to stimulate the private sector, no State intervention, and the liberalization of the economy. Nevertheless, the eradication of poverty did not depend solely on government initiatives, since it also required the support of the international community, which must discharge the commitments made at international summits and conferences on development. If the global objective were to be achieved of halving, between 1993 and 2015, the number of those living in absolute poverty, declarations and good intentions were not enough. What was needed was positive action supported by clear and viable strategies, at the national and international levels.

86. In the *Human Development Report, 1997*, Governments and other institutions wishing to contribute to the eradication of poverty were advised to increase the capacity of the poor to withstand illness, economic crises, natural disasters, conflicts and discrimination. In that context, the importance should be emphasized of microcredit as a factor in economic independence and the promotion of development, for women in particular.

87. The Microstart Programme was being implemented in Madagascar. With support from the United Nations Development Programme and a budget of \$1.6 million, it would help to strengthen local microcredit institutions and facilitate access to credit by poor people.

88. **Mr. Lateef** (World Bank) said that the eradication of poverty was central to the World Bank's agenda. The global financial crisis and the projected deceleration in world economic growth threatened the livelihood of millions in the developing world. Children were particularly vulnerable, since they were being pulled out of school and put to work, and their nutritional status was under pressure, especially when climatic conditions combined with the macroeconomic crisis to reduce family income. Such events were not good news for the 3 billion people currently eking out an existence on less than two dollars a day, who risked being neglected by

Governments that were forced to concentrate their attention on the financial crisis.

89. The World Bank was committed to help avoid such an outcome. While admitting that its response to the debt crisis of the 1980s had been too little, too late, the World Bank had reacted rapidly to the crisis in East Asia. It had focused on priority programmes that could reach poor communities quickly, and was working to help keep children in school, create jobs, provide social protection and maintain supplies of food and essential medicines. The debt crisis of the 1980s and subsequent experience had convinced the World Bank that there was a need for balance, and that financial, institutional and social elements must be considered together. The international community must learn to have a debate where figures would not take priority over humanitarian considerations, and the need for drastic change must also take into account the interests of the poor. Only in that manner could sustainable solutions be reached.

90. He did not, however, mean to suggest that the World Bank had discarded traditional recipes for long-term poverty reduction. It remained as true as ever that the eradication of poverty could only be achieved by a combination of inclusive growth and expansion of the capabilities of the poor. At the international level, "inclusive" meant that no countries were left behind, and at the national level, it meant that growth expanded the opportunities of the poor, especially in agriculture. It should not be forgotten that East Asia had pursued such a path and achieved an unprecedented decline in poverty. It was not true that the current crisis had wiped out those gains, which were still greater than the losses. Investment in human capital was not so easily wiped out, and those countries would undoubtedly recover quickly.

91. At the same time, the current crisis had shown that traditional approaches to poverty reduction must be extended in three directions, namely, inequality, institutions and insecurity. With respect to inequality and exclusion, structural inequalities must be tackled through land reform and access to credit and education. As for institutions and governance, the quality thereof was a large factor in determining what access the poor had to basic social services. Insecurity and vulnerability, meanwhile, were central properties of poverty, and efficient safety nets should therefore be a permanent feature of the institutional landscape of every country.

92. Those issues would be explored in the *World Development Report* on poverty that would be issued in September 2000. Since the *Report* would represent one of the World Bank's key contributions to the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, the preparation process for the Bank's third decennial review of poverty would be highly collaborative and consultative, and would incorporate

consultations with the poor, civil society, Governments, development agencies and the United Nations system.

93. At the same time, the World Bank was continuing to move on a broad front in order to help address the international goals of poverty reduction. Measures to be adopted included the extension of immediate support to countries affected by the global financial crisis through a programme of technical assistance, advice and financial support, to which the Bank had pledged some \$17 billion in financing; the mobilization of resources for the poorest member countries (negotiations for the twelfth replenishment of the International Development Association were drawing to a close); addressing the needs of the heavily indebted poor countries (the eligibility period for the initiative for those countries had been extended to the year 2000); the creation, collection and dissemination of knowledge on effective poverty reduction mechanisms, using research related to the planned *World Development Report* and the dissemination of existing knowledge; and ensuring that the Bank's country assistance strategies had a stronger poverty focus and increased their attention to progress towards international development goals.

94. The Bank was addressing that large agenda on poverty in close collaboration with bilateral agencies, civil society and the United Nations system. It had been working at a technical level with various agencies in the United Nations system and with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on indicators for monitoring progress towards the international development goals. While believing that change must come from within societies, the Bank declared its readiness to continue to work with countries that were genuinely committed to addressing the needs of the poor.

95. **Ms. Watanabe** (United Nations Development Programme) said that despite considerable social progress in many countries in recent decades, the fact remained that more people lived in poverty today than at any other time in history. That not only offended human dignity and violated the basic human rights of one fifth of the world's population but also undermined economic growth and jeopardized peace, democracy and security.

96. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) strongly supported the goals of the International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, the World Summit for Social Development and the other global conferences on social issues sponsored by the United Nations during the 1990s, and she was proud to report that an overwhelming number of UNDP country programmes were focused on poverty and sustainable livelihoods.

97. UNDP was assisting nearly 100 countries in the tasks of improving data collection and formulating national strategies for poverty eradication. With support from UNDP, more than 100 countries were producing national human development reports, most of which had poverty as one of their central themes. UNDP country offices were also playing a very active advocacy role in an effort to put poverty issues on national policy agendas.

98. The financial crisis affecting much of eastern Asia made it increasingly clear that economic globalization, while opening up trade and financial markets, seemed to be increasing the gap between rich and poor in many countries and was making the task of eliminating poverty increasingly difficult. Prompt and decisive action was needed to halt the decline in living standards in countries which had fallen prey to the global financial crisis, and Governments must enact policies to expand economic opportunities quickly for disadvantaged households and communities, and make them less vulnerable to future shocks. In particular, fast and balanced growth was urgently needed in the heavily indebted countries of sub-Saharan Africa, where the future of innumerable families was literally mortgaged in order to service loans from bilateral institutions, private banks and international organizations.

99. The eradication of extreme poverty required harnessing the strengths and capabilities of poor people themselves and the contribution of community groups, trade unions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Systems of governance must also be transparent and democratic.

100. Despite the recent setbacks, Governments, development agencies and non-governmental organizations were increasingly dedicated to rapidly achieving the objectives established by the World Summit for Social Development in the area of poverty eradication. Nearly 80 per cent of Governments had already taken steps to measure the extent of poverty and identify its causes; about 60 per cent had formulated initiatives to fight poverty. The next important step was to set specific targets and deadlines, which only about one third of the world's Governments had done to date.

101. Experience had demonstrated that the United Nations system had been able to support country-level efforts most effectively in countries where the United Nations system worked cohesively. No agency had sufficient resources to go its own way, and the eradication of poverty was a strong galvanizing theme for promoting cooperation among agencies, funds and programmes within the framework of the United Nations Development Group and in line with proposals for reform of the Organization.

102. **Mr. Lal Das** (Nepal) said that eliminating poverty from the face of the earth and ensuring sustainable development and lasting peace were major challenges for the twenty-first century. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development had reaffirmed that the most productive social and economic policies and investments were those that empowered people to maximize their capacities, resources and opportunities. Sustainable social and economic development would never be achieved without full participation by women and absolute equality of men and women.

103. Poverty was not only lack of food and clothing and denial of school and health facilities and basic human rights, which prevented people from assuming their responsibilities; it was also a factor in insecurity, powerlessness and economic exclusion. That was the situation in the developing world, especially in the most densely populated countries.

104. The goal of eradicating poverty, which was a social, ethical, political and economic imperative, could hardly be achieved without an integrated and coordinated approach. Such an approach entailed combining programmes, resources and strategies to meet the needs of those living in poverty, promote their productive capacities and empower them to participate in decision-making and thus affect them directly. Broad-based economic growth, social development and environmental protection were indispensable for the lasting eradication of poverty. Economic growth alone was not sufficient; justice and equality, and strengthened participation by women and by the most disadvantaged in the formulation of policy must also be included. There must also be political change for the promotion of democracy. Governments must be transparent and responsible at all levels, and democratization, human rights protection, equality of the sexes and the empowerment of women must also be reinforced. All that was possible if society had the necessary will to act.

105. In an increasingly mobile and interconnected world, the patterns of economic growth and abysmal poverty within a country and among regions could also influence the course of events and the movement of peoples. Differences in lifestyles and opportunities for the rich and the poor, made obvious by the media and tourism, led young people in the developing world to leave their homeland, bound for greener pastures.

106. Governments and all those working for development, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and the international community in general, must implement the agreed objectives of the world conferences and summits. A strong and amicable relationship between the developed and developing countries was essential for the eradication of

poverty; international efforts in that regard must be adapted to national and local circumstances and based on an assessment of the needs of the poor.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.