

Agenda Item 103 & 104: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family and the International Year of Older Persons

Statement by Mr. Asith Bhattacharjee, Counsellor

and Mr. Bremley W.B. Lyngdoh, Member, Indian Delegation

on September 28, 2000

Madam Chairperson,

Allow me first to congratulate you and the members of the Bureau on your election. As usual, the introductory statements of Under Secretary General Mr. Nitin Desai and Director DESA, Mr. John Langmore were as thought provoking, as the “2000 Report on the World Social Situation”. We found it extremely useful and would seriously urge the Division to examine whether it could not be issued more frequently; say, once in two years.

Trends in the 2000 Report are disconcerting. Though the rate of growth of the world population slowed down, its distribution changed with more people, about 80%, living in developing countries. Whereas, in the sixties, 22% of the population of developing countries lived in urban areas, this figure almost doubled to 40%. In the last 40 years, the number of cities with a population of over a million increased three-fold; from 112 to 372. Urbanisation and its attendant social consequences are an issue that developing nations have to reckon with.

The nineties saw a sharp setback for developing economies with near stagnation of their per capita incomes. This, as a fraction of that of the developed countries, fell from over 20% in the beginning of the last decade to below 20%. The rich became richer and the poor consigned to inexorable poverty in unacceptably increasing numbers. The 2000 report is chilling. The incidence of child poverty increased rapidly in developing countries and the situation is critical. Though poverty in old age has been combated in developing countries through state assured pension schemes, newer problems like alienation are increasingly on the rise. Their informal economy is increasing and a global workforce of a billion, almost one third of the world’s workforce, is under-employed and consigned to this sector. Wage disparities “dramatically” increased in the past decade. Developing countries are faced with the double burden of older diseases not being fully eradicated while acquiring those that traditionally were major causes of death in developed countries. Violence against women, prostitution and violence against children have all risen. Organised crime has grown to “monumental” proportions.

Globalisation contributed in no small measure to the world social situation. Breaking down the protective role of the state with arguments of an “efficiency” driven market engine, have had extremely negative impact on distributive justice. The social implications of this fall-out are writ large on the faces of the world’s 1.2 billion poor.

No wonder, then the 2000 Report warns of a “clear danger” of the repetition of the experience of globalisation and liberalisation of the early 20th century with a few enclaves of “modern” or “progressive” countries commanding global heights with the majority left to drift outside the mainstream of integration.

With these comments, I yield the floor to our youth delegate, Mr. Bremley Lyngdoh.

Madam Chairperson,

As the first Indian youth representative to be included in India’s delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, it is a great honour to address this committee on the theme of involving youth as active partners in decision making towards the creation of sustainable livelihoods.

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. It is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and still maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.

The creation of sustainable livelihoods has become an important factor in sustainable development, particularly in developing countries and among disadvantaged populations. More support should be given to the promotion and development of economical and environmental sustainable youth livelihoods. Sustainable development requires an explicit consideration of future generations. Youth will inherit many of the environmental, economic and social problems created over the past decades and incorporating their opinions and concerns into policies at all levels is critical to sustainable development. The capacity of young people to address sustainability issues and become leaders in the 21st century is also critical.

. Addressing the concerns of young people worldwide is critical to the success of sustainable development programmes because they are the current and future leaders of our communities. Encouraging civic involvement and investing in youth’s key concerns must be an urgent priority of Governments and Civil Society. Recent major international conferences have addressed issues surrounding youth livelihoods development. However the resolutions that emerged from these conferences have, in some areas, failed to be sufficiently acted upon. Therefore it is up to us the youth, to take actions consistent with the commitment made by Governments in these world conference. To that end, there is a move for a great public gathering and conversation in the fall of 2002 called the Youth Employment Summit, with a goal of launching a Decade Campaign of Action so that 500 million young adults, especially youth facing poverty, will have productive and sustainable livelihoods by the year 2012.

While youth in developing countries (particularly young women) will have improved access to more relevant education and training to develop their improved skill sets and self-motivation required to generate and sustain viable livelihoods, much more needs to be done. With better policy and programming congruence among education, training and credit provision, youth with enhanced skill sets, will be better equipped to access credit, develop and sustain self-employment initiatives. More effective and relevant education and training will result in more productive employment in micro and small businesses, particularly in the

informal sector, larger enterprises that seek enterprising self-motivated employees, and government and civil society that seek enterprising employees. The improved skills and self-motivation of the emerging generation will contribute to increased social and economic productivity of communities. Improved skills will also be conducive to fewer social and political problems that are based on youth unemployment and lack of initiative. Overall, improved skills will contribute to enhanced employment opportunities and the practical generation of sustainable livelihoods for young women and men.

Our Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee in his Independence Day address said, "India has now become a Young Nation." Youth in the age of 15-35 years constitute approximately 34% of the total population in our country. According to the 1991 census, the total population is roughly 271 million. However, the changing socio-economic scenario, a need was felt for a new comprehensive National Youth Policy. Action has been initiated, by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sport to formulate a revised Youth Policy taking into account the needs and aspirations of the youth. To channelise the immense energies of youth into constructive work, this ministry is implementing several programmes to inculcate the values of secularism and national integration, training and upgradation of skills to open up economic opportunities to them, and to develop leadership qualities. With regard to the International Year of Volunteers in 2001, India has shown its commitment as a leader in volunteerism where millions of its young people are mobilised to serve as volunteers in various social, economic and environmental projects and programmes.

Livelihood is a broader category than employment and more in line with the actual manner in which many young people in developing countries organize themselves and their activities in order to survive. Adaptability and dynamic livelihood capabilities are the key to generating sustainable livelihoods. Dynamic livelihood capabilities can be thought of as enterprising behaviour in a developing context. The institutional challenge is to improve the effectiveness of the non-formal training system in order to mediate the latent potential of young people into productive social and economic activity, while understanding their current livelihood conditions and capabilities. Governments need to address key global policies that affect youth employment and livelihood. They need to take strategies that promote self-employment and entrepreneurship, school to work programmes and work-based training. Partnerships with the private sector needs to be strengthened and the use of new information and communication technologies to support youth employment and training must be encouraged. The youth themselves must be empowered to generate the solutions to youth employment and their best practices and success stories must be acknowledged at all levels to support further replication of such initiatives from the grassroots to the global level.

Madam Chairperson,

Young people bring entrepreneurship, dedication and a sense of possibility to international policy planning. Youth organizations must maintain sustained international pressure to help forge a coherent follow-up to the UN world conference commitments. This is the challenge that lies ahead. Young people have contributed to each "Plan of Action or Platform for Action" adopted by the UN conferences. They have joined forces with the broader Civil Society after all, issues that affect humanity also affect youth.

President John F. Kennedy said, "The future promise of any nation can be directly measured by the present prospects of its youth." Let us show a true partnership with youth in the international community. The youth are the leaders of tomorrow but they are your partners for today.