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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Chairman:

Mr. SOMAVIA

(Chile)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 90: WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION (continued) (A/45/137-E/1990/35)

AGENDA ITEM 92: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION CONCERNING DISABLED PERSONS AND THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS (continued) (A/45/470)

AGENDA ITEM 96: POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES INVOLVING YOUTH (continued) (A/45/225, A/45/227, A/45/280, A/45/338, A/45/422)

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AGENDA ITEM 104: INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FAMILY (continued) (A/45/365; A/C.3/45/3)

1. Mrs. EKONG (Nigeria) said that the report of the Secretary-General, contained in the supplement to the 1989 Report on the World Social Situation (A/45/137), showed with statistical clarity that in many of the developing countries, especially in south Asia, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, standards of living and social conditions had dropped below the levels existing 10 years, and in some cases 20 years, earlier. Poverty, infant mortality, illiteracy, environmental degradation, the loss of skilled human resources to the North and the decline in financial resources to deal with medical crises, such as the AIDS pandemic, were some of the most serious social problems in the countries of the South.

2. Poverty was the biggest problem affecting the world social situation. According to the World Bank, by 1985 more than 1 billion people had been living in absolute poverty: 55 per cent in south Asia and 38 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. The Nigerian delegation was gravely concerned at the World Bank's forecast of an increase in the number of poor people, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Poverty not only paralysed the material progress of the individual and his group, but virtually closed all other opportunities. If the impoverishment of the world's population was allowed to continue, social, political and economic growth would be jeopardized, and instability intensified, in the decade of the 1990s.

3. At the national level, Governments should pursue a strategy that relied on greater utilization of individual labour and involved policies that used market principles for individual activity and enterprise. It was also necessary to ensure and maintain a pattern of resource allocation that provided basic social services to the poor, especially in the areas of primary health care, family planning, nutrition and primary education. That had been the experience of the Nigerian Government in its struggle against poverty.

4. However, national efforts must be reinforced and complemented by increased development co-operation and better international economic conditions. The Nigerian delegation urged the developed countries to increase aid flows and financial assistance to the most affected developing countries to deal with the

(Mrs. Ekong, Nigeria)

problem of poverty. Increased aid was required for many anti-poverty programmes which were well conceived but lacked funding. Her delegation regretted that, in spite of the developing countries' increased need for financial resources to tackle poverty, official development assistance (ODA) from the developed donor countries had fallen from 0.36 per cent in 1988 to 0.33 per cent in 1989. The Nigerian delegation called on the developed countries to implement the undertaking to attain the agreed target of devoting 0.7 per cent of the GNP to ODA and, where possible, to increase concessional external resources for development and for tackling the problem of poverty.

5. There were other serious problems, such as infant mortality, the drop in revenue of developing countries, and maternal mortality, which had been an obstacle to advancing the status of women and improving the welfare of children. The equality of life had been seriously threatened by environmental degradation arising from the adverse consequences of scientific and industrial development, on the one hand, and the unregulated and irrational use of the earth's resources that had resulted in deforestation, desertification and the depletion of energy resources on the other hand, as well as natural disasters. All countries had a responsibility for the preservation, protection and security of the environment, particularly the developed countries, which had the technological capabilities to make that possible. The Nigerian delegation looked forward to the Conference on Environment and Development, to be held in Brazil in 1992.

6. The problem of drug production, supply, demand, trafficking and distribution had had a destructive effect on social and political life in many countries. The Nigerian delegation reiterated its position that the solution of the problem involved two aspects: elimination of demand and destruction of sources of supply. Solutions should also be pursued at the social level by educating the public against the use of drugs and by rehabilitating addicts.

7. Her delegation supported the efforts of the Secretary-General to give effect to the operative provisions of General Assembly resolution 44/82, proclaiming 1994 as the International Year of the Family. It also commended the Secretary-General for the organizational arrangements he had undertaken as specified in paragraph 10 of document A/45/365.

8. Every effort must be made to build a society that was not only secure, and respected the rights of all individuals, but was also compassionate and caring. The Nigerian Government had increased resources for the provision of more facilities to disabled people, particularly the blind. The Nigerian delegation expressed the hope that the Committee would adopt far-reaching recommendations on ways to mark the end of the United Nations Decade for Disabled Persons in 1992.

9. Nigeria noted with satisfaction the report of the Secretary-General on policies and programmes involving young people, and wished to commend the Department of Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs for the activities in follow-up to International Youth Year. Nigeria encouraged the formation of youth organizations so as to enable young people to express their views on all subjects.

(Mrs. Ekong, Nigeria)

It welcomed and fully endorsed the recommendations set out in paragraph 14 of document A/45/422, particularly the recommendation concerning the urgent need to revitalize the resource base of the United Nations Youth Fund in view of the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year and the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1995.

10. Mr. KRENKEL (Austria) said that his country's social system and the Austrian Constitution were based on the premise that enhancing the population's quality of life, particularly that of children and young people, and establishing a social welfare State were of the highest priority. Austria therefore endorsed the conclusion in the Secretary-General's report on policies and programmes involving young people that the spirit of International Youth Year must be revitalized. The Austrian Government attached considerable importance to youth questions and was actively participating in the preparations for the International Year. It had consequently helped to establish the organization HOPE 87, whose secretariat provided assistance in dealing with youth and employment issues, particularly in the developing countries. So far HOPE had provided financial assistance for youth-employment projects in Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Kenya, Nepal and the Philippines. Financial promotion of more projects would be intensified in the future.

11. With regard to the Secretary-General's report on the problems of the disabled, Austria believed that a variety of recommendations deserved the General Assembly's attention, but had some reservations with respect to others. It was necessary to be very selective in giving the Secretariat additional tasks within the framework of the Decade of Disabled Persons.

12. The Austrian Government was very interested in the question of aging and had adopted comprehensive measures to improve the situation of the elderly in Austria. The United Nations Office at Vienna had made some progress in the implementation of the Vienna Plan of Action since its adoption, in spite of meagre human and financial resources. The Secretary-General's report, which contained a programme of action for the tenth anniversary of the World Assembly on Aging, was a good one, and Austria supported the proposals set out in it.

13. Austria had studied the Secretary-General's note on the International Year of the Family carefully, and agreed that a detailed proposal on the subject should be reviewed by the Commission for Social Development early in 1991. It attached great importance to the subject and would participate actively in the preparations for and observance of the Year, which would deal not only with the role of the entire family in society but should also address such issues as youth, the situation of women, the elderly, the disabled and a wide range of family-related topics.

14. He wished to reiterate that major international instruments could not be implemented until concrete measures were taken to strengthen the United Nations Office at Vienna. Asking for more reports and further measures through various resolutions would add to the Secretariat's burden rather than enhance the quality of its reports and its general policy-making capacity. Austria was ready to

(Mr. Krenkel, Austria)

exercise restraint because it believed that social-policy and social-development concerns were of vital importance to the enhancement of quality of life for all. The United Nations and the secretariat dealing with social development and humanitarian affairs must focus on specific topics and give guidance to Member States in order to enable them to meet their individual challenges. New approaches towards and ways of using scarce resources in the most efficient manner must be found in order to guarantee that social policies and programmes had the high status they deserved on the international agenda.

15. Ms. VAN DER ZIJL (Netherlands) said that, since concern for the environment now was a guarantee of earth's survival tomorrow, millions of young people were calling for immediate action in order to build a solid base for the future, and a clean environment was an essential part of the future.

16. At the current turning-point in history, after the Berlin Wall had been torn down and at a time when the new détente between East and West could lead to arms reductions and cut-backs in military expenditure, the funds thus released must be used to improve quality of life on earth, in accordance with the wishes of the public at large, whose attention had been drawn to the many recent manifestations of environmental degradation: ozone depletion, the hole in the ozone layer above the Antarctic, climate change and the destruction of tropical rain forests, as well as such disasters as the oil spill in Alaska, the nuclear accident at Chernobyl, and the dumping of hazardous waste in developing countries.

17. In an attempt to tackle the issue of environmental degradation, the Netherlands had published an environmental policy plan in 1989, whose aim - to ensure that today's environmental problems were not passed on to future generations - could only be achieved if current patterns of production and consumption were changed; the Netherlands had allocated slightly more than \$4 billion to protection of the environment for the period 1990-1994. She also wished to mention the Bergen Conference, held in May 1990, which had resulted in the Plan of Action for a Common Future and in which non-governmental and youth organizations had participated, the latter having produced their own plan, entitled "Tomorrow Today".

18. In an endeavour to give added impetus to policy-making in the area in question, young people in the Netherlands were to hold a national demonstration at The Hague on 22 April 1991, International Earth Day. They would present a document containing proposals for the various ministries. In the month preceding the demonstration, local action groups would engage in a campaign calling on people to try to live in an environmentally sound manner. Since environmental pollution was a matter of international concern, the demonstration would have much more impact if young people all over the world were to hold demonstrations on the same day.

19. In addition to the efforts to increase people's awareness of environmental problems, attention must be devoted to formulating and implementing international public policy and rules to prevent pollution. Young people in the Netherlands had great expectations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development,

(Ms. Van der Zijl, Netherlands)

to be held in Brazil in 1992, and were willing to play a constructive part both in the preparations for the Conference and in the Conference itself. Just as young people had in the past often been at the forefront of the fight for freedom and democracy, they were willing now to take up the fight for the survival of the planet. Young people felt responsible for the future environment and supported pressure groups such as Greenpeace, because the consequences of most environmental problems would manifest themselves in 20 to 30 years' time, when today's policy makers would no longer be in power.

20. It was important to bring about a change in the behaviour and lifestyles of not only the older but also the younger generation. All countries of the world should accordingly develop and implement environmental education and training programmes in schools and universities, and the United Nations could play a vital role in identifying the needs of each country through a comparative survey of existing environmental education programmes. The UNEP/UNESCO International Environmental Education Programme provided an appropriate framework for the promotion of environmental education. The Government of the Netherlands, for its part, was preparing a special educational programme on nature and the environment and had invited youth and environmental organizations to take part in the development of that plan because of their knowledge and experience in that field.

21. As early as 1972, the Secretary-General of the United Nations had said that channels of communication between the Organization and young people were inadequate. Eighteen years later, only a few of the 159 Member States had included young people's representatives in their delegations. All other countries should follow that example, since young people had a right to participate in the shaping of their future.

22. In conclusion, she said that young people wished rhetorical proposals to be set aside and environmental issues to be approached pragmatically, with observance of existing environmental laws and guidelines, which in many cases were ignored.

23. Mr. AL-GHANEM (Saudi Arabia) said that Governments should understand that the disabled did not wish to be an object of pity or charity, but wanted to enjoy their legitimate rights as citizens. Society, for its part, should endeavour to understand them and change its attitude towards them, since anyone who was normal today might be disabled tomorrow.

24. His Government, which was keenly aware of the situation of disabled persons, had implemented an educational and rehabilitation programme for the disabled so that they could become useful members of society, and had taken part in the activities of the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 and in many seminars and symposiums.

25. The measures adopted by the United Nations and, in particular, the United Nations Office at Vienna, had made it possible to explain to Governments how important it was to attend to the needs of disabled persons, who were much neglected, especially in many developing countries, and were not provided with the

(Mr. Al-Ghanem, Saudi Arabia)

services they needed, even though they accounted for 10 per cent of the world population, in other words some 500 million persons, 80 per cent of them in developing countries. At the meeting of experts convened by the United Nations and held in 1988 in Stockholm to review progress during the first half of the Decade, it had been seen that, even though most Governments had not adopted the necessary measures, they had at least become aware of the need for such measures and were prepared to commence work in that field, which gave reason to hope that within the space of 20 years the specific problems of disabled persons would be resolved throughout the world.

26. The 92 recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General for the current session were highly relevant and their implementation would therefore help to solve many of the problems of disabled persons. Decision makers must understand the problems of disabled persons and give them priority, for example by setting aside 1 per cent of military spending to address the social problems of disabled persons.

27. After examining the report of the Secretary-General (A/45/470), his delegation had prepared a draft resolution which included the views of disabled persons themselves, and urged the members of the Committee to adopt it so that the United Nations could use it as a basis for implementing the recommendations of the meeting held in Finland and other similar meetings held under the auspices of the Organization. Meanwhile, even though hundreds of resolutions had been adopted in the past, disabled persons continued to find themselves in a precarious situation, as was the case in most of the developing countries. For that reason the co-operation and support of all were needed to smooth the way ahead and enable disabled persons to live a happy life.

28. Mrs. SHERMAN-PETER (Bahamas) said that significant initiatives in the field of social development had been taken in the 1980s, such as the proclamation of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and International Youth Year. Difficulties could be observed, however, in sustaining those activities. Although action for social development must be initiated at the national level, through government policies and programmes, there were serious economic constraints preventing many countries, especially those of the developing world, from undertaking extensive social programmes.

29. At the international level the problems faced included resource constraints and difficulties in monitoring performance in the social fields. In any event, pressure was being exerted on the international community to rethink and reappraise its approach to achieving objectives and monitoring progress, an exercise in which both Governments and relevant United Nations bodies must participate.

30. For example, a more coherent approach must be adopted in preparing for the International Year of the Family, proclaimed by the General Assembly for 1994. In recent years, demographic changes and the demands of modern life were among the factors exerting both positive and negative influences on the family. The celebration of the International Year would afford both opportunities and

(Mrs. Sherman-Peter, Bahamas)

challenges in addressing problems like family violence, single parenting, health, housing, drug abuse and other serious issues. Welcome developments were the introduction of the question of discrimination against women and the adoption of administrative and other arrangements so that substantive work might begin at the next session of the Commission for Social Development. Her country had provided data in connection with the preparation of a draft programme for the International Year of the Family and plans to establish a national co-ordinating body in the near future in order to improve the flow of information between her country and the Social Development Division.

31. On the subject of disabled persons, the Bahamas, aware as it was that no society intent on development could exclude any segment of its population, viewed with interest the recommendations of the group of experts which had met in Finland in May to advise the Secretary-General on the preparation of the feasibility study on ways and means to mark the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. For example, a Disabled Desk was to be set up in the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Affairs which, among other responsibilities, would advise the Government on policy concerning the disabled with a view to integrating them into national and local development plans, co-ordinating relevant national activities, increasing awareness of disability issues and systematically assessing the specific needs in each area of disability. Areas targeted for early action included the enactment of legislation to prohibit discrimination against disabled persons and protect their rights, and to promote alternative activities to increase their participation in culture and sports. The Desk was to be headed by a disabled person, and the new arrangements were intended to support the efforts of voluntary organizations spearheaded by the Bahamas National Council for Disabilities and to allow for better co-operation and co-ordination among the various ministries and departments of government which provided financial, technical and material support for the disabled.

32. Since 52.25 per cent of the population of the Bahamas was under 25 years of age, her country had a keen interest in United Nations activities in the field of youth. National policy in that area followed the guidelines laid down for International Youth Year. That task had been greatly facilitated by the National Youth Advisory Council, a standing body which had served as a national co-ordinating committee for International Youth Year activities. The primary focus was on the development of skills which would give young people new options for their social, economic, cultural and political development, particularly through the expansion of employment opportunities and the provision of the education which they needed in order to take advantage of those opportunities.

33. In order to counteract unemployment among youth, the Government had promoted programmes such as Junior Achievers, which was designed to acquaint young people with economic principles and business practices and to give them an opportunity for self-employment. The programme had attracted some 6,000 participants in 10 years. In the field of education, there had been success in increasing school retention rates, free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 had been established, and a full secondary education system, structured training and post-secondary education

(Mrs. Sherman-Peter, Bahamas)

opportunities existed, as well as income support where necessary. A scholarship programme had greatly increased the number of young people who had access to higher education, which had expanded the number of professionals and technicians. Moreover, sports development was viewed as an integral part of national development, as it was not only a unifying force but also a source of discipline and other positive attributes. That had been demonstrated by the well-known success of Bahamian athletes over the years, and sports development would continue to be a priority for the Government.

34. Ms. ZABOLAI-CSEKME (International Labour Organisation) said that the activities of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) concerning youth, older workers and the disabled derived from its overall mandate to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment, to foster equality of opportunity and treatment and to improve working conditions and the work environment.

35. Unemployment among youth had reached critical levels in many regions of the world. ILO was convinced that measures to reduce youth unemployment had to be an integral part of national development plans and economic policies, since specially designed youth employment programmes often had a limited scope and a fragmentary nature. In addition, such schemes would have very limited results in areas where fiscal and monetary policy discouraged job creation or where lack of access to credit, skills or technologies imposed barriers to self-employment. Accordingly, ILO was carrying out a research project which involved the preparation of studies on the status of youth employment in selected countries of Asia and Africa and on the relationship between youth employment schemes and the larger policy framework in which they were set, so that lessons could be drawn with a view to the formulation of sound youth employment policies.

36. Other ILO activities to promote youth employment included the provision of direct assistance to Governments in adjusting training policies and transforming training institutions to meet the needs of the labour market. There were a variety of technical co-operation projects to foster the development of vocational and managerial skills, and others to promote self-employment, particularly in the informal sector, which were aimed at young school drop-outs; special attention was also being paid to training young women for employment and self-employment.

37. With regard to the protection of young people, ILO was promoting the ratification and application by member States of the Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, and through its computerized data bank, located at the International Occupational Safety and Health Information Centre (CIS), it provided updated information on national or international publications dealing with the occupational safety and health of youth.

38. With regard to older workers, ILO was pursuing three objectives, namely, eliminating discrimination against them in the workplace, especially with regard to remuneration, employment security and social benefits, fostering the social protection of older workers by improving their working conditions and environment and providing them with vocational guidance and training which enabled them to

(Ms. Zabolai-Csekme, ILO)

retain their jobs or to secure new employment, and helping to ensure that older workers had a decent standard of living when they retired and that the transition from active life to retirement had no damaging effects. In order to achieve those objectives, ILO promoted the application of related labour standards and carried out research and operational activities, which included assisting Governments in the establishment of income-maintenance systems and social services for the aged and the administration and functioning of related programmes. A computerized information system provided access to a data base covering pension legislation and similar social security enactments concerning the aged. In 1989, ILO had provided support to the International Institute on Aging in preparing a training programme on income-maintenance and support for the aged in developing countries, which had been undertaken by an expert group. Those activities were fully in keeping with the United Nations International Plan of Action on Aging.

39. ILO was concerned with the prevention of disability and the social and economic rehabilitation of the disabled through both its mainstream activities and specially designed programmes. Since poverty and the malnutrition which it caused were the world's greatest disabling factors, the efforts of the ILO to create employment and income-earning opportunities were an indirect but important contribution to the aim of reducing disability. Another crucial aspect of the Organization's preventive activities was its long-standing struggle to improve occupational safety and health in the workplace. Since its establishment in 1919, ILO had developed a variety of international labour standards promoting maximum safety conditions for workers engaged in dangerous occupations, such as construction, underground work, or the handling of chemical substances.

40. The Organization's principles concerning vocational rehabilitation and the employment of disabled persons were laid down in Convention 159, adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1983. The technical co-operation projects designed to implement those principles included assistance to ILO constituents in the formulation and implementation of national policy on vocational rehabilitation and the employment of disabled persons and the provision of vocational guidance and training, placement and employment services to disabled persons; they were executed in collaboration with Governments and workers' and employers' organizations. The importance of such co-operation had been underscored by a seminar on the role of social partners in the training and employment of disabled persons, held in Malawi in May 1990, which had been financed by the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA).

41. During 1989, 42 ILO projects concerning vocational rehabilitation had been put into operation; of those, 17 national and 6 regional projects had been executed in Africa and 8 in the Middle East. ILO had also served as a focal point for the revision of the development education kit prepared by the Joint United Nations Information Committee JUNIC and non-governmental organizations, entitled "Women and Disability", which had been completed in 1990 and was currently in print.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.