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at 6 p.m.  
New York

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 17th MEETING

Chairman: Mrs. COOMBS (New Zealand)  
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of the Chairman, Mrs. Coombs (New Zealand),  
(Vice-Chairman took the Chair.)

The meeting was called to order at 6.15 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)

AGENDA ITEM 99: QUESTION OF AGING (continued) (A/45/207, A/45/420)

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

1. Mr. TROTTIER (Canada) recalled that Canada had supported the General Assembly resolution proclaiming the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and had been a leading supporter of the objectives of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. As the end of the Decade approached, an appraisal could be made of action taken to integrate disabled persons into society. He described measures taken in Canada for that purpose.

2. In 1991, Canada would be conducting a second post-census survey to collect data on disabled persons that would enable policies and programmes to be better designed. Canada was taking measures to promote independent living for persons with disabilities, and was providing support for a network of independent living centres. Canada's National Access Awareness Week highlighted the need for disabled persons to have access to all places they wished to enter.

3. Canada supported the recommendations contained in the feasibility study on alternative ways to mark the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (A/45/470), and believed that persons with disabilities must be involved in the decision-making process.

4. The Canadian delegation expressed its satisfaction with the report of the Secretary-General on the question of aging (A/45/420). He hoped that the report would serve as a catalyst for many activities at various levels; activities were already being planned in Canada to mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Aging. Canada was confident that the celebration of the tenth anniversary would provide an opportunity to develop a blueprint for policies concerning older persons in the twenty-first century.

5. He considered that the draft global calendar of events on aging, 1991-1992, contained in annex I to the report of the Secretary-General would be very useful to those involved in planning activities to mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption

(Mr. Trottier, Canada)

of the International Plan of Action on Aging. The Canadian delegation agreed that it was necessary to set tangible targets on aging, to be reached co-operatively by the year 2001, as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General, and he expressed the hope that the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs would successfully finalize a set of global targets for consideration by the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session, in 1992.

6. He recalled that 1990 had been proclaimed International Literacy Year, and described literacy programmes in Canada as they affected senior citizens. According to recent statistics, only one in three Canadians between the ages of 55 and 69 possessed reading abilities in English and French sufficient to deal with written material encountered daily. Moreover, 15 per cent of persons in that age group described themselves as being unable to read. One way of improving that situation was to simplify the language on forms and other government documents that seniors were required to fill in to establish their rights, and the Government of Canada had in fact just taken an initiative to ensure that government publications could be understood. Since September 1988, the National Literacy Programme had supported some 40 projects designed to combat illiteracy in Canada, and a National Literacy Strategy for older Canadians would be released in 1990.

7. Lastly, in addition to the activities to be carried out in 1992 to mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Aging, the International Year of the Family, to be celebrated in 1994, would provide another opportunity to examine the role that seniors must play in society.

8. Mr. WICKREMASINGE (Sri Lanka) said that the reports submitted by the Secretary-General on the cluster of items now before the Third Committee provided a useful basis for the Committee's deliberations, and he expressed the hope that they would help to enable the Committee to complete its work on time. The statements made by other delegations also constituted a useful contribution to the discussion.

9. He then described Sri Lanka's experience in the field of social development. The Government of Sri Lanka had accorded the highest priority to the question of social development and was seeking to give the people a new deal through a new vision and a new order of things.

10. Sri Lanka had a population of almost 17 million people, more than half of whom were dependent, and 80 per cent of whom lived in rural areas and relied on agriculture. Factors that were often beyond the Government's control had caused poverty to spread.

11. In order to combat hunger and malnutrition, the Government of Sri Lanka had launched a scheme of subsidies, popularly known as Janasaviya, or "the People's Strength". Under the scheme, eligible family units were paid a monthly allowance of 2,500 rupees, part of which was used for consumption while the other portion was deposited in an interest-yielding savings account. The scheme was not merely charity, but was designed to help the individual eventually to stand on his own feet. In that connection, he recalled the words of the United States President,

(Mr. Wickremasinghe, Sri Lanka)

Abraham Lincoln, who had said "You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves". That reflected the current thinking of the Government of Sri Lanka in the battle it was waging against poverty, ignorance and fear.

12. In 1978, the President of Sri Lanka had launched the village reawakening programme known as Udagam Vyaparaya to deal with the problem of homelessness. By 1988, the 10-year target had been exceeded, and it could be considered part of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000, which was the most ambitious programme undertaken by the international community in the field of human settlements.

13. Sri Lanka was conscious of the need for a harmonious relationship between man and the environment as a prerequisite for social and economic progress, and had adopted a "National Conservation Strategy".

14. Environmental degradation was threatening the very existence of mankind and had spawned such problems as the gradual depletion of the ozone layer and global warming. In the case of the latter, if remedial steps were not taken in time, the biblical "great deluge" could well occur by the year 2020. In other words, according to that frightening estimate, human civilization would last only ten thousand days more. Man should realize that it was not in his best interest to interfere unduly with his natural surroundings. While the eradication of hunger and poverty, human resource and institutional development and management of population growth were priority aspects of socio-economic development, the highest priority should be given to current environmental problems.

15. According to the Secretary-General, all countries should take effective action to protect and enhance the environment, bearing in mind the specific needs of the developing countries, and the developed countries should bear the main responsibility for taking such action. Resources should be channelled and rational, environmentally sound technologies should be transferred to the developing countries on preferential terms. The goals set in General Assembly resolution 44/228 for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development scheduled to be held in 1992 needed to be realized.

16. Sri Lanka was co-operating fully in preparing for the aforementioned conference, which would have to devise a modus vivendi that would help to ensure the very survival and existence of mankind.

17. Sri Lanka was addressing the questions of the family, children, youth, the disabled and the aged from the broader perspective of social welfare. In that context, Sri Lanka had launched programmes to supply free food stamps, free education at all levels, free health care and other similar programmes which were paid for entirely from the State's coffers. Some of the most tangible results of Sri Lanka's social welfare programmes were a literacy rate of up to 90 per cent, an infant mortality rate of 27.04 per thousand live births and a relatively high life-expectancy at birth, of 72 years for females and 68 for males, thus ensuring for the people fuller enjoyment of human rights.

(Mr. Wickremasinghe, Sri Lanka)

18. Sri Lanka had given pride of place to the youth of the country and had created the necessary institutional mechanisms for its education, training and employment. A Presidential Commission on youth had been appointed to study the problems of youth and in addition, a Ministry of Youth and Sports and other departments at the national level had been set up to address the training needs of young people at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, in all disciplines.

19. Regionally, the country was co-operating with six other south Asian nations, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan; together with those countries it constituted the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). The areas of co-operation included social development. Sri Lanka had a good record of co-operation with the international community, and with the United Nations system in particular, in supporting initiatives to achieve greater social well-being for mankind.

20. Sri Lanka had recently become a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child because it regarded the Convention as a useful contribution to children's emancipation and welfare. The Government of Sri Lanka was in the process of drafting the National Children's Charter, which would take into account the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the country's own obligations arising from its signature and ratification of that instrument.

21. As far as co-operation among developing countries was concerned, Sri Lanka was participating actively in the Group of 77, the Commonwealth and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, particularly through the Action Programme for Economic Co-operation of the Non-Aligned Countries and the Colombo Plan. His delegation hoped that in the future new initiatives would be forthcoming from the international community, to the benefit of all countries and peoples.

22. In conclusion, his delegation would welcome greater interaction between the Commission for Social Development and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development because of the pivotal role played by research.

23. Mr. BABOS (Romania) said that it was not by chance that the Third Committee was considering items 90, 92, 96, 99 and 104 simultaneously, because they were all closely related matters. For example, there was a link between the social function of the family and the level of the participation of youth in determining the destiny of the society in which it lived and a link between the well-being of the family and the status of old people and disabled persons within the society. Consequently, in dealing with one particular problem, the whole range of issues should be borne in mind and the conflicts between priorities were especially difficult to resolve.

24. In Romania, the frightening magnitude of the suffering of hundreds of thousands of sick children or disabled and old people had only been revealed only in the past 10 months. The changes that had occurred in Romania during that time had underlined the meagreness of the resources available to alleviate that suffering quickly.

(Mr. Babos, Romania)

25. Although significant changes had taken place in Romania in certain respects, in the promotion and protection of the human rights of the individual and the freedoms of the citizen, as far as the improvement of the condition of some extremely vulnerable groups was concerned, those changes did not meet the real needs of the people. His delegation wished to express its appreciation for the generous support from the countries that had responded so promptly to Romania's requests and to thank those countries which during the years of isolation under the dictatorial régime had drawn attention to the violation of human rights in Romania. Furthermore, the confidence expressed by certain countries that the renewal process in Romania was irreversible in itself represented very valuable support, which would stimulate and accelerate the process so that Romania would cease to be a country reaching for democracy and become a democratic country in the fullest sense of the word.

26. The protection and guarantee of human rights was one of the areas where declarations of principle were not enough; practical measures were needed and Romania was currently concentrating its efforts in that direction.

27. Young people were currently powerful agents of change and Romania's hope. Freed from the former rigid structures, young people were setting the pace in the creation in Romania of a united society under the rule of law. Their initiatives were reflected in the growing role being played by non-governmental youth organizations as determining factors in the practical solution of the distressing problems afflicting the country.

28. Nevertheless, Romania lacked an appropriate national basis for instruction, because numerous educators did not have professional qualifications, having long devoted themselves to ideology instead of knowledge.

29. At the same time, the accelerated pace of transition to a market economy was creating new problems and it was estimated that by the end of 1990 there would be 120,000 unemployed persons in Romania, with that figure rising to nearly 1 million in 1991; in view of the scarcity of available economic resources, the attempt to reduce the social impact of that phenomenon, which was unprecedented for Romania, could intensify the competition among social priorities.

30. Referring in particular to the situation of disabled persons in Romania, he noted that they numbered approximately 600,000. Prior to December 1989, the concept of disabled persons had not been embodied in legislation and the previous Constitution had not recognized the status of such persons. There had been only two associations of disabled persons: one for the blind and one for deaf mutes.

31. With regard to the specific situation which Romania had inherited, it was obvious that virtually nothing had been done in the eight years which had elapsed since the proclamation of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, and the misguided population policy implemented between 1966 and 1989 had considerably increased the number of seriously disabled persons. That did not mean that an optimum solution to the situation could be achieved through the liberalization of abortion, for example. An appropriate social education, including family planning,

(Mr. Babos, Romania)

was the framework within which more feasible solutions could be found. Romania fully shared the view that the objectives of the International Year of the Family should be achieved in harmony with national and local conditions and that the task of the United Nations should be to support efforts at the national level.

32. In early 1990, urgent measures had been taken in Romania to triple the subsistence allowances for disabled persons in schools, long-term care facilities and nursing homes for the elderly. Social assistance had also been established for disabled persons with no income. The number of maintenance and teaching staff at institutions for the disabled would be tripled.

33. In the past six months, various organizations of the disabled or organizations to assist them had been established. The United Nations recommendation that a national committee of the disabled should be established was being put into practice. A proposal had been made to include an article on the status and rights of the disabled in Romania's new Constitution.

34. Romania was determined to implement effectively all the provisions of the international conventions on the disabled to which it was a party. In that connection, it supported the proposal by Sweden concerning the establishment of an open-ended working group to consider the problems of the disabled.

35. Romania appreciated the solidarity shown by the countries of Western Europe and the assistance granted by various international intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and many others, and the contribution made by the European Economic Community and the World Bank to accelerating the implementation of programmes for the protection of children and the disabled in Romania.

36. Mrs. MBELLA NGOMBA (Cameroon) said that three factors were increasingly impeding the attainment of several social objectives as embodied in various declarations and plans of action adopted by the General Assembly with the sole objective of alleviating the plight of the vast majority of mankind, irrespective of categories. Those three factors were related to the worsening of economic and social conditions, the lack of common parameters for the determination of new criteria for achieving development and the lack of political and financial commitment which would provide a basis for the implementation of decisions.

37. The difficulty in coming to terms with social problems appeared to derive from the lack of a political will to establish the inextricable link between social deprivation and the lack of economic expansion. However, it could be seen clearly that the lack of economic opportunities in several developing countries together with austerity measures designed to confront the resultant economic crisis had trapped several societies in a vicious circle of budget cuts affecting social programmes, with the consequent reduction in government funding and grants for schools and the displacement of youth from rural to urban areas. That exodus had led to overcrowding in several third world cities, with a concomitant rise in the crime rate, particularly among youth.

(Mrs. Mbella Ngomba, Cameroon)

38. The phenomenon of rising unemployment and the way in which it affected the morale of youth was rapidly becoming a major preoccupation for the Government of Cameroon, since youth accounted for more than 52 per cent of the country's population. The negative impact of structural adjustment programmes was beginning to threaten the capacity of the Government to carry out educational policies and programmes and its commitment to provide free public education for all youth up to university level; young people were increasingly faced with the prospect of unemployment, even for university graduates. Her delegation looked forward with interest to the results of the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action recently adopted by the World Summit for Children and to the thirty-second session of the Commission for Social Development, which would have as two of its major themes the problem of the integration of young people into society and the social impact of the critical economic environment on developing countries.

39. With regard to the emergence of a new focus for development in co-operation with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other bodies, her delegation was convinced that the United Nations must play a significant role in the establishment of a common platform on which developing countries could later build their association with those major funding organizations, with a view to entering into effective bilateral and multilateral negotiations so as to enhance the capacity of Governments and their communities to design and implement social programmes which met their economic goals.

40. With regard to the item concerning the disabled, Cameroon endorsed the results of the feasibility study on alternative ways to mark the end of the Decade of Disabled Persons (A/45/470), in 1992, and endorsed the conclusion reached by the group of experts that had met in Finland in May 1990 that one such way would be to develop a strategy for action to the year 2000 and beyond. Cameroon also endorsed the recommendation to convene a ministerial-level world conference on disability in 1993 with the theme of "A society for all by the year 2010", and with a long-term strategy clearly establishing minimum progress for Member States to make in improving the situation of disabled persons.

41. Her delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to strengthen the Disabled Persons Unit at the United Nations Office at Vienna so as to provide technical and administrative guidance for the execution of the activities relating to the end of the Decade and beyond. The ultimate objective should not be limited to the rehabilitation of the handicapped but should include the elaboration of standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for the disabled, whether they were children, young people or adults.

42. With regard to the designation of 1994 as the International Year of the Family, Cameroon recognized the difficulty that the United Nations Office at Vienna faced in trying to co-ordinate the celebration of family values against a background of diverse religious, cultural and legal situations. Programmes under the Year should therefore be planned nationally, with the United Nations Office at Vienna playing only an advisory and co-ordinating role. In that connection, her delegation endorsed the organizational recommendations set out in the Secretary-General's report (A/45/365).



43. Mrs. MOHIUDDIN (Bangladesh), speaking under agenda item 90, said that the Committee had before it the supplement to the 1989 Report on the World Social Situation (A/45/137-E/1990/35), which painted a gloomy picture of the developing world. The situation in the least developed countries was even worse. There, very basic human need remained unfulfilled.
44. In Bangladesh the approach taken to development had changed. In the past, Bangladesh had not always focused sufficiently on human resources development and quality of life. Now, the Bangladesh authorities were aware that they must place greater emphasis on quality than on quantity.
45. At the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries a new programme of action had been adopted. Both the Programme of Action and the international development strategy for the fourth United Nations development decade gave priority to the removal of poverty and hunger and to the strengthening of institutions.
46. With regard to agenda item 92, the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons was drawing to a close, and although many of its goals had not been achieved there had been some definite achievements. The chief achievement was having developed greater awareness of the problems of the disabled. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report (A/45/470), that concern for the disabled should not end with the Decade. Bangladesh endorsed the recommendations set out in the report.
47. Bangladesh was firmly committed to implementing the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, and that commitment was reflected in its National Policy on Disabled Persons, which encouraged full participation by the disabled in the development process. The goal was that the disabled should be self-reliant. The Ministry of Social Welfare had undertaken some specific programmes in the areas of education, training, employment and rehabilitation. It also helped disabled people set up small enterprises and provided them with interest-free loans for that purpose. In the area of rehabilitation, emphasis was placed on community-based programmes. The National Policy, which took a multidisciplinary approach, had given priority to the needs of disabled women and disabled children.
48. The prevention of disabilities was another area on which Bangladesh focused. The Government promoted educational programmes in that connection with a view to improving nutrition and health care. The programmes in question had helped to prevent blindness and some other handicaps.
49. Bangladesh non-governmental organizations complemented government action by promoting the welfare of the disabled, but the country's programmes suffered from a lack of resources. Assistance was therefore required from donors.
50. Bangladesh shared the concern expressed by other delegations at the financial crisis faced by the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. Despite its lack of resources, Bangladesh would make a contribution to the Fund. The United Nations system had an important role to play in meeting the needs of the disabled. Better co-ordination among the specialized agencies would be necessary, however.

(Mrs. Mohiuddin, Bangladesh)

51. On the subject of agenda item 96, she considered it most regrettable that in many countries young people were unable to contribute to progress because they were often illiterate, or unemployed or were caught in a vicious cycle of drugs and violence. Action must be taken at the national, regional and international levels to mobilize their creative potential.

52. Young people made up one third of the population of Bangladesh. The National Youth Policy was designed to ensure their socio-economic development, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports co-ordinated policy in the field. Special attention was devoted to academic and vocational training for young women in order to ensure equal opportunity. In that connection, she wished to express her gratitude to Austria for the assistance provided in setting up the HOPE office in Bangladesh, whose purpose was to promote youth employment.

53. The tenth anniversary of International Youth Year, in 1995, would be a suitable occasion for giving priority to the issue once again. In that connection, Bangladesh endorsed the recommendation in paragraph 14 of the Secretary-General's report (A/45/422) regarding future priorities. The United Nations, in general and UNESCO, in particular should continue to play a key role in the field in question.

The meeting rose at 7.25 p.m.