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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 21st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. AL-SHAALI (United Arab Emirates)

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ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 94: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (continued)

- (a) QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (continued) (A/46/3 (chap. VI, sect. B), A/46/56-E/1991/6 and Corr.1, A/46/137-E/1991/40, A/46/281-E/1991/112, A/46/315, 360, 361, 362 and Corr.1, 366, 414, 501/Rev.1)
1. Mrs. SAMONTE-LIMJUCO (Philippines) said that her delegation supported the UNESCO Plan of Action for Literacy. Illiteracy could be vanquished, but the pace of progress must be stepped up significantly if the goals of international action plans were to be achieved. Basic education for all was not only a human right, it was also the cornerstone of human development.
  2. Her delegation subscribed to the objectives of the International Youth Year. The draft world youth programme of action towards the year 2000 and beyond should focus upon underprivileged youth, youth in poor rural and urban sectors, disabled youth and young refugees and migrant workers. It would be desirable to involve youth in environmental concerns and to infuse the programme with a sense of urgency.
  3. Her Government noted with concern that, as pointed out in the Secretary-General's report on international cooperation on ageing (A/46/361), in the 75 years from 1950 to 2025, the world's elderly population was expected to increase from 200 million to 1.2 billion, or from 8 to 14 per cent of the total global population, and that the developing countries were projected to age more quickly than the developed countries had in the past. It was imperative that a practical strategy should be drafted to improve the International Plan of Action on Ageing.
  4. Notwithstanding the need to raise awareness for the concerns of ageing, the resources being spent for commemorating the tenth anniversary of the World Assembly on Ageing in 1992 might be better used in the United Nations Trust Fund for Ageing, for which contributions had been declining, and might also be channelled towards research projects for the benefit of the elderly, for example on Alzheimer's disease. Her delegation praised the newly-established Banyan Fund Association: A World Fund for Ageing, which promoted activities within the context of the International Plan of Action on Ageing that would enable the elderly to remain independent and contribute to society.
  5. Her Government supported the proclamation of 1994 as the International Year of the Family, and a national programme of action was being formulated to celebrate the year in the Philippines. On the plight of the disabled, the United Nations must take practical steps to promote their well-being, particularly in developing countries.

(Mrs. Samonte-Limjuco, Philippines)

6. In the Philippines, the dignity of the human person was enshrined in the Constitution, which mandated the promotion of a just social order, guaranteed respect for human rights and recognized the sanctity of the family. In 1987, the Family Code of the Philippines had been promulgated in order to bring the provisions of the Civil Code on marriage and family relations more into line with Filipino customs, values and ideals to reflect contemporary trends and conditions. The Constitution recognized the role of young people in nation-building and protected their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual and social well-being and ensured the right to health and to a balanced and salubrious environment. In pursuance of the constitutional mandate to further social justice, the 1988-1992 medium-term plan had set national development goals, giving particular attention to employment, especially in rural areas, and also focusing on education, health, nutrition, family planning, housing and community services.

7. Her Government's development efforts had yielded encouraging results. There had been a marked improvement in health care and housing, and school enrolment had reached a record level. Recently, however, the Philippines had sustained a number of setbacks. Two coup attempts had been made, a severe earthquake had levelled major cities in the north, a typhoon had struck and the eruption of Mount Pinatubo had wrought widespread destruction, displacing hundreds of thousands and causing major damage to the economy. Her Government expressed its gratitude to those who had provided assistance to the Philippines at a time of great need.

8. Mrs. KABA-CAMARA (Côte d'Ivoire) said that social development was closely related to economic development, and no social progress could be made in a stagnant economy. In Africa, economic recovery plans such as the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery had not produced the desired results, despite commendable economic and political restructuring efforts by many Governments. The structural adjustment policies recommended by IMF and the World Bank were intended to restore economic growth through balanced budgets, but a drastic reduction in social spending in order to decrease Government expenditure had brought about a severe decline in the standard of living, particularly for the most vulnerable groups. Falling commodity prices had drastically reduced financial flows to Africa, and the debt burden had undermined any hope of economic recovery. The weakened social fabric had thus given rise to discontent and political instability in many countries.

9. Côte d'Ivoire had not been spared, as a result of a significant drop in the prices of coffee and cocoa, and unemployment had increased considerably. Nevertheless, the Government had attempted to spare the education and health sectors in its budget cuts.

(Mrs. Kaba-Camara, Côte d'Ivoire)

10. The changing perception of development among international authorities was encouraging as evidenced by the emphasis on the human being in the 1991 World Development Report. Her delegation welcomed the report on improving quantitative and qualitative indicators on social conditions and standards of living (A/46/137), in particular the project on the social dimensions of adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa. In Côte d'Ivoire, human well-being was the ultimate goal of the Government's development activities. Despite the economic crisis, the disabled, retired persons and families continued to receive government assistance, and several private initiatives in that area had begun.

11. The extended family played a key role in Ivoirian society. In educating children, caring for the elderly and disabled, and providing assistance to impoverished members through a social-security system based on family solidarity, the family remained its most important and precious institution. The erosion of family values as a result of economic problems was of great concern; therefore, her delegation attached great importance to the 1994 International Year of the Family and the preparatory activities described in document A/46/362. Her delegation deplored the lack of resources available for implementing the plans of action on ageing, the disabled and literacy. It appealed to Member States to increase contributions to special funds encouraging initiatives for Africa.

12. Sadly, those who had encouraged the democracy movement in third-world countries were unable to sustain those fragile democracies by substantial contributions to their development. In an interdependent world, it was an illusion that a minority could base its prosperity on the misery of most of mankind. There was still time to put aside North-South rivalries based on national and regional interests and to formulate a universal policy with the well-being of all humanity as its goal.

13. Mr. HANSEN (Canada) said that Canada had made great strides on disability-related issues and the previous month had launched a five-year national strategy for the integration of persons with disabilities with the goals of equal access, economic integration and effective participation through active partnerships involving Governments, the private sector and the disabled community. Part of its future strategy was to seek linkages at the international level, such as INDEPENDENCE 92, an international congress and exposition on disability scheduled for April 1992 on the theme of self-determination by persons with disabilities. Its purpose was to promote independent living for every person with a disability, regardless of age, sex or race. Representation from Governments, business, industry and world organizations from over 80 countries was expected.

14. The congress would focus on community and independent living, economic independence, education, equality, full participation, social change strategies and technology. As part of the observance of the conclusion of the Decade of Disabled Persons in 1992, INDEPENDENCE 92 would build an awareness

(Mr. Hansen, Canada)

raised during the Decade and turn it into concrete action. It would celebrate the achievements of persons with disabilities and reflect on the success of the Decade, but would also explore and identify current and future needs.

15. Canada would host and fund a meeting of experts in conjunction with the congress, in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1991/9, with the primary objective of drawing up a long-term strategy to implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. The expert group would need to consider legislation and governing mechanisms, community-based rehabilitation, independent living, human rights and economic independence, and to identify initiatives which could contribute to the integration of people with disabilities appropriate to particular environments. Its other goal should be to recommend a mechanism to coordinate and monitor activities beyond 1992.

16. Mr. JOUSHAN (Afghanistan) said he regretted that the significant progress made in implementing the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons had not extended to the developing countries. His country had over 1.5 million disabled persons including a half million victims of the long war, needing the assistance of national and international humanitarian organizations. His Government had put aside political considerations and was using all its limited resources to attempt to relieve their sufferings.

17. His Government had taken a number of measures in implementation of the World Programme of Action, including establishment of a national association for the handicapped and disabled which served all, regardless of political affiliation or cause of disability. It had also cleared mines and other unexploded ordnance to prevent further disability. A special assistance fund for the disabled had been established, and legislation on compensation of those disabled in the line of duty and on the rights and privileges of disabled persons was being drafted.

18. His delegation expressed appreciation for the valuable support of Governments and international organizations which had assisted in the treatment of war casualties, especially children. The humanitarian activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross deserved special mention. Its orthopedic centres reached only a small number of the disabled, but represented a very good beginning. A UNDP consultative commission for rehabilitation also had been established in Kabul to provide employment and support services. His Government would welcome further help in job creation and financial, scientific and technical assistance to expand prosthetic centres. His delegation endorsed efforts to shift the focus of the United Nations disability programme from awareness-raising to action with the aim of achieving a society for all.

19. Ms. RUGTVEDT (Norway), speaking as a youth delegate, emphasized the importance of having young people participate in political decision-making in all countries. Nations must send more young people as delegates to the

(Ms. Rugtvedt, Norway)

General Assembly: currently only three nations had representatives from youth organizations in their official delegations.

20. Young people often led the struggle for democracy and respect for human rights, and it was important that their voices should be heard. Norwegian youth organizations were in favour of launching of the United Nations initiative for a global structure to improve communication between youth non-governmental organizations and the Organization.

21. Today's youth was impatient: there were too many resolutions and not enough action on such pressing issues as the widening gap between rich and poor, the growing number of refugees and looming environmental problems. Young people were particularly concerned about the danger of global warming, the extinction of many species, and air and water pollution. Environmental problems could even lead to military conflict. Priority was given to the production of military weapons, whereas insufficient resources were set aside to address environmental issues. The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development must direct its efforts to securing sustainable growth and drafting international environmental law. Environmental issues could not, however, be resolved without reducing the gap between North and South or tackling the debt crisis.

22. Young people were particularly concerned about the impact of alcohol and narcotic drugs in the third world. She supported the recommendation of the World Health Organization to reduce total alcohol consumption by 25 per cent by the year 2000 and also subscribed to its programme to combat substance abuse.

23. Mr. MAIER (Austria) said that, although the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons would be ending in December, its work must continue. It had provided the incentive for numerous programmes of action concerning disabled persons, which had improved living conditions particularly for people with impaired hearing. An example of successful action was the so-called "Transversale Graz-Portoroz" (the bicycle marathon for hearing-impaired cyclists) carried out under United Nations patronage.

24. At the previous session, he had spoken of the disadvantages faced by the hard of hearing. Communication and access to information, education and knowledge was often impossible without visual means. Increasing international interest in sign language might well be due to increasing recognition of the rights of minorities. Sign language was a source and a tool of the culture of the deaf. It should also be part of everyday media. It was currently being examined in scientific centres in Austria and most other European countries, and with United Nations support, Austria had increased the number of television broadcasts with subtitles and sign language. He urged Government to recognize the need for sign language to be accepted as an independent language and integrated in the education of deaf people, and to call for its increased use in television.

(Mr. Maier, Austria)

25. Early diagnosis of hearing impairment and subsequent therapy were essential to prevent communication disability. Hearing checks for babies should be compulsory. The suicide of an Austrian sculptor who had believed that his deafness was incurable had brought out the need for support and led to the establishment of an institution for general medical support with a general practitioner trained in sign language and communication with people who were hard of hearing.

26. Lastly, he stressed that all acoustic danger and emergency signals should be produced in visual form as well. He urged all Governments, as a matter of the highest priority, to work closely with associations of disabled persons and reinforce their efforts to overcome barriers.

27. Mr. SIGURDSEN (Iceland), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, stressed the need to give greater attention to social issues. The improved international political climate provided a unique opportunity to enhance the role of the United Nations in promoting economic and social development. The Nordic countries welcomed the growing recognition of the vital relationship between democracy, human rights and sustainable development. During the past decade, the economic and social situation in most developing countries had deteriorated. More than a billion people, the majority of them women and children, lived in absolute poverty. Economic growth was necessary to reduce the number of poor people, and there was a need to distribute wealth equitably and improve general living conditions. Sustainable development and protection of the environment and natural resources were essential aspects of social development, which must be taken into account in all future planning in that field.

28. The advancement of equality between men and women was a cornerstone of social development. Education should be given higher priority as a development objective and a means to promote better health and economic growth and improve social conditions in general. Literacy programmes for women and girls deserved the highest priority since that would lead to better family planning and foster economic and social development. Teaching mothers to read was a stepping-stone towards literacy of the entire family. The Nordic countries had welcomed the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and advocated further action to achieve the goals laid down at the World Summit for Children. Young people were the key to future progress and human resources development. Education, cultural development and good living conditions for youth were of utmost importance. More effective action to combat drug abuse and the spread of AIDS was also a vital issue.

29. The contribution by elderly people to social development was often given less attention than it deserved. The International Plan of Action on Ageing, regrettably, had been poorly implemented. It was necessary to review the progress made and take new steps on the basis of that assessment. As the United Nations prepared for the 1994 International Year of the Family, the Nordic countries considered it important to give adequate attention to the

(Mr. Sigurdssen, Iceland)

changing structure of the family, single-parent families, and equality between men and women and their changing roles in the family.

30. The dramatic increase in the drug problem around the world posed a serious threat to economic and social development in many countries. The important steps taken in recent years to combat drug abuse had encouraged Governments to intensify their efforts at the national level and had helped strengthen global programmes.

31. As the end of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons approached, there was a need to assess what had been accomplished. The Decade and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons had increased awareness of the needs of disabled people, especially in developing countries. Nevertheless, the implementation of the World Programme had been disappointing. Although special solutions designed specifically for the disabled were often useful and necessary, integrated solutions aimed at equalization of opportunities were of primary importance. The United Nations and Governments had an important part to play in promoting the role of the disabled in social development. Accordingly, there was a need to strengthen the Disabled Persons Unit in the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

32. The Nordic countries had welcomed the establishment of an ad hoc working group by the Commission for Social Development in order to elaborate standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled people, and hoped that the group would complete its work so that the Commission could consider the rules at its session in 1993.

33. Referring to the Secretary-General's interim report on the world social situation (A/46/56-E/1991/6), he drew attention to the difficulties inherent in making international comparisons of expenditures on social services. In view of the need to take into account the different measures applied by countries, it was necessary to develop systems that provided comparable information on the methods of delivering social services. Economic and Social Council decision 1991/230 requested the Secretary-General to consult Member States on the possibility of convening a world summit for social development. The Nordic countries expressed their desire to cooperate constructively with the Secretary-General in that regard.

34. Mrs. SHERMAN-PETER (Bahamas) stressed that development had both economic and social dimensions, which were critically linked. The capacity of numerous countries, particularly in the developing world, to attain social objectives had been adversely affected by the international economic situation. Debt, structural adjustments and poverty were eroding many of the gains made. In its response, the international community must analyse and address the social implications of international economic development and place greater emphasis on social development issues, including the development of indicators to identify social trends, particularly in the developing world.



(Mrs. Sherman-Peter, Bahamas)

35. Emphasis on social development should encourage a more thorough evaluation of the possibilities for improving social conditions through the Guiding Principles for Developmental Social Welfare policies and programmes in the near future (A/46/414). Efforts to enhance prospects for implementing the Principles through regional cooperation had already yielded results. Contacts were being made for a regional conference on the implementation of the Principles in Latin America and the Caribbean.

36. There was a need to forge ahead in efforts to address the issues affecting youth, the disabled and the elderly. Although more had been done to integrate young people into development, the situation of youth was far from satisfactory. Reduced social and economic resources, especially in developing countries, limited the opportunities available to young people. Youth unemployment and underemployment continued to increase. The Bahamas had identified education as a principal vehicle for approaching youth employment problems and facilitating the integration of young people into development. Considerable emphasis was placed on designing meaningful school curricula and teaching technical, vocational and professional skills. Direct job experience was stressed and information about career choices and the job market was provided.

37. Her Government had taken a number of measures to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment on the part of young people. There were plans to establish a youth venture-capital loan fund for young entrepreneurs and a National Small Business Advisory Council had been established to advise youth. The Bahamas followed innovative approaches to promote the involvement of youth in voluntary service, health care, the media, sports and leisure activities.

38. The development of new patterns of cooperation to help the disabled was one of the major accomplishments of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. In her country, the Decade had given impetus to efforts to remove obstacles to equalization of opportunity and to set up a national support system. The Bahamas had recently established a Desk for the Disabled in the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Affairs.

39. By the year 2025, 70 per cent of persons over the age of 60 would be living in developing countries. Research, care, and ways of integrating the elderly into development must be considered global priorities. Her delegation was impressed by the pace of preparations for the 1994 International Year of the Family. Much could be accomplished by the system-wide cooperation made possible by the identification of focal points in United Nations bodies. The International Year would provide the opportunity for focusing on the family and prospects for progress on a wider range of social issues. A fuller understanding of new family structures, including dual-career families and single-parent families, should be gained. Fostering the development of each individual within the family should have positive implications for the advancement of women. The issues of disability and ageing, and deviant

(Mrs. Sherman-Peter, Bahamas)

behaviour, including violence against women, juvenile delinquency and drug abuse, could all be addressed in the context of the Year.

40. The Bahamas had recently established a National Commission on the Family. The Commission was in the process of reviewing family-related matters and would provide direction for the national programme of activities for the International Year of the Family. Lastly, she emphasized the contradiction in expanding the mandate of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs while at the same time decreasing its resources. Member States must take steps to solve the Centre's urgent problem in that regard so that it could carry out its work effectively.

41. Mr. AL-THANI (Qatar) said that his Government accorded the greatest importance to the welfare of young people and thereby expressed its conviction that the rising generation was vital to the future progress of the country. It had recently expanded its social welfare agencies for youth and had established a new agency for youth and sports in order to encourage the participation of young people in activities of benefit to themselves and their society. The new agency reflected increased interest in the lives of young people and in promoting cooperation and mutual understanding. Cultural associations and sports clubs had been established to coordinate youth activities and to draw up the necessary plans for the expansion of facilities. Youth leaders were undergoing training and facilities had been constructed for the reception of young persons from other countries. The technical and financial assistance provided to sports clubs, the Qatar Red Crescent Club and the Qatar Sports Association had been increased.

42. The activities undertaken had also included informational and cultural projects to encourage young people to participate in intellectual life, to take part in international festivals and to organize lectures and seminars. There had been numerous initiatives in the arts, the theater and music aimed at encouraging young people to participate actively. A Qatar Olympic Committee had been established in order to provide technical assistance to sporting associations, and it had participated in international and regional activities and in meetings of the International Olympic Committee.

43. Qatar followed with interest the activities of the United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs and was always ready to cooperate in the implementation of General Assembly resolutions relating to social matters. It looked forward to participating in the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year in 1995, which would provide an appropriate opportunity for focusing attention on an essential element of society in the light of changing economic and political circumstances and the impact of those changes on youth and on the organizations that served it.

44. Matters relating to youth were becoming extremely important at the international level because of lethal epidemics and social problems to which there were no quick solutions. International planning, cooperation and

(Mr. Al-Thani, Qatar)

preparation for the future were therefore essential. Qatar supported in full measure the plans being made by the specialized agencies of the United Nations to encourage the activities of young people and to address their problems and overcome the obstacles to the development of modalities to promote their emergence as a useful element for their societies and for the international community as a whole.

45. Miss BOTERO (Colombia), speaking also on behalf of Mexico and Venezuela, said that one of the lessons of the past decade was that the economic and social aspects of development were indivisible. The international community must take a broader view of development, recognizing its "human face" and realizing that there could be no economic progress without a sound social base.

46. Despite the new era of cooperation and conciliation between East and West, there were no grounds for optimism. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of health care and proper education still prevailed in many developing countries. The burden of foreign debt and its servicing had increased; and environmental problems, crime, drug abuse and illicit trafficking were still matters of serious concern.

47. She was concerned that the interim report on the world social situation (A/46/56-E/1991/6) did not fully reflect the guidelines set by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. For example, the analysis of the main indicators of social progress and standards of living had been far more comprehensive in respect of certain countries, particularly those in transition from a centrally-planned to a market economy.

48. In selecting issues and trends, the report had focused on two main aspects: institutional changes and social services. In the case of the former, her delegation considered that the scope was somewhat limited. While the changes in the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries had been profound and merited examination and evaluation, there had been radical political and economic changes in the developing countries, too, which called for more detailed analysis. In Latin America, for example, countries were moving towards an open economy, dismantling tariff barriers and embarking on privatization.

49. The report also failed to link the questions of the environment, drug abuse, illicit trafficking, and disarmament with current economic and social conditions. She hoped that the next report would bring out the link more clearly. Drug abuse was not exclusively a problem of health and crime prevention. It was a global problem with different manifestations and required integral, multidisciplinary treatment. As for the environment, the report should have been more explicit on the interrelationship between environmental degradation and poverty.

50. Although the Gulf War had temporarily diverted attention, the "peace dividend" had not disappeared. Its full realization depended on progress

(Miss Botero, Colombia)

towards a viable peace and a world in which disputes between nations were not settled by arms and where armed forces were reduced to the minimum. In that connection she stressed the importance of the chapters on the role of government and on expenditure on social services.

51. Lastly, she felt that the end-notes to the report were somewhat haphazard. For example, there were many references to private or media sources, but hardly any to reports of specialized agencies.

52. With regard to the future, the 1993 Report on the World Social Situation should have the objective, realistic, balanced and global approach needed for an effective analysis of the world social situation and should fully reflect the international economic and social trends and the situation of the developing countries. It would be useful to have an opening chapter giving a global view of social problems in the context of economic conditions. Items 10 and 14 of the draft framework, on social change in the global context and on new challenges to social security policies respectively, could be considered as introductory chapters to the report, and be followed by an analysis of world social parameters and issues such as the environment, drugs and communication. Such reports would help towards effective measures for solving problems. In that connection, Economic and Social Council decision 1991/230 on the possibility of convening a world summit for social development was extremely important and she urged the Secretary-General to continue his consultations.

#### ORGANIZATION OF WORK

53. Mr. RAVEN (United Kingdom) said that earlier in the session he had raised the question of the Secretary-General's report on enhancement of the United Nations structure for drug abuse control (A/46/480), as requested in General Assembly resolution 45/179, and had asked for it to be issued in good time for consideration by Member States before the debate on item 96 (Narcotic drugs). The report had not yet been issued but the debate was due to start on 30 October. His delegation accordingly wished, through the Chairman, to request the Secretariat to inform the Committee at the next meeting of the status of the report.

54. The CHAIRMAN replied that he had communicated with the President of the General Assembly and that the Secretariat had assured him that the report would be issued on 29 October. He was still waiting for information on the other documents.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.