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FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:
REVIEW OF RELEVANT UNITED NATIONS PLANS AND
PROGRAMMES OF ACTION PERTAINING TO THE SITUATION OF
SOCIAL GROUPS

Emerging issues, trends and new approaches, and programme
activities of the Secretariat and the regional commissions
relating to social development, including the situation
of specific groups

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Social welfare and social development activities of the
regional commissions for the biennium 1995-1996

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INTRODUCTION

1. During the period 1995-1996, the regional commissions have continued to undertake, within their respective regions, follow-up activities to international conferences and implementation of international programmes of action for social development. Particular impetus has been provided by the World Summit for Social Development, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, and follow-up to the International Year of the Family. In response to General Assembly resolution 50/161 on implementation of the outcome of the Summit, the regional commissions will organize high-level meetings and/or expert group meetings, as well as other related events, to evaluate follow-up activities to the Summit. The promotion of policies and programmes for poverty alleviation and for managing the social consequences of structural adjustment, social integration and human resource development have received special attention. Activities targeting disabled persons, crime prevention, drug demand and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) prevention have also been undertaken within the respective mandates of the commissions.

I. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

A. Social development and welfare

2. The social problems facing the countries in transition to market economies are in many ways similar to the problems of the developed economies of western Europe, which are currently restructuring their economies, with profound implications for employment and the existing forms of social protection. Accordingly, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Government of France, with the support of the European Community, organized a workshop on the theme "Managing the social consequences of structural change" in Paris on 28 and 29 November 1996.

3. The workshop sought to examine the impact of structural change on employment, workers' mobility and the functioning of labour markets, as well as the goals and forms of the social protection system, the way it operates and is financed; and to examine what forms of cooperation between the State, the social partners, local communities and the social welfare agencies might contribute more effectively to the management of the social consequences of structural change.

4. Other activities relevant to social development include the work of the ECE Statistical Division in the field of population and housing censuses. Currently, the ECE Statistical Division is preparing a set of ECE-Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) recommendations on populations and housing censuses in the region for the year 2000. Those recommendations will be ready for approval by the Conference of European Statisticians in 1997. With regard to social indicators and frameworks, the Conference of European Statisticians, through the ECE Statistical Division, participates in the work of the Siena Group, which deals with issues related to social monitoring and social

exclusion, intergovernmental relations, and social mobility and the integration of minority groups.

5. With regard to gender statistics, regular meetings are convened by the Conference to promote the collection of data disaggregated by sex and to assess and consider the gender dimension in a number of areas, such as unpaid work, health, employment, living conditions and ageing. For the 1995 World Conference on Women, the publication, Women and Men in Europe and North America was prepared. Regarding migration, ECE is participating in the preparation of a new set of draft international migration statistics together with the United Nations Statistical Division and Eurostat. The ECE secretariat is also producing the annual publication Housing and Building Statistics in Europe and North America, while its statistical yearbook, Trends in Europe and North America, contains social profiles of all 55 ECE member countries.

B. Youth

6. As part of the its population programme, ECE is conducting a survey involving men and women aged 20 years and over in 19 ECE member countries and New Zealand. Based on a common questionnaire containing various retrospective questions on vital issues, such as the choice of partners and marriage, decisions to have children and leaving the parental home, the survey will enhance the study of the effects of various social and economic conditions on the life experiences of individuals during youth and adolescence. Research themes to be studied, based on the data collected, include patterns of leaving the parental home, the impact of family dissolution on partnership behaviour of the next generation, sexual initiation and the contraceptive practices of adolescents.

C. Ageing

7. The four-year ECE project supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) "The dynamics of population ageing in ECE countries", was completed in 1996. The project will facilitate research on the social and economic conditions of the older population in Europe and North America. The project has assembled a set of cross-nationally comparable depersonalized microdata sets based on the 1990 round of national population and housing censuses, which will be used to study the social and economic conditions of older persons in a selected number of ECE member countries. Research themes to be studied will include labour force participation status; economic conditions and mobility patterns of older persons, as well as their living arrangements; and the social, economic and demographic characteristics of older persons living in institutions, in comparison with non-institutionalized older persons. The project is expected to increase the awareness of policy makers and non-governmental organizations in the field and to enhance national capacities for formulating and evaluating programmes and policies targeted towards older people. The following 14 countries have participated in the project: Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Russian Federation, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

8. Within the context of the above-mentioned project, a workshop on social protection, poverty, and older persons at risk was organized by the ECE secretariat and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). The workshop was also part of the activities marking 1996 as the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, and constituted a preparatory activity for the International Year for Older Persons (1999) and the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006). The aim was to define strategies for providing income security in old age, with an emphasis on the alleviation of poverty among older persons in high-risk groups. The programme of the workshop covered four main topics: conceptual issues of poverty in old age; women as one of the groups at risk, and the process known as the feminization of poverty; specific issues of poverty among other groups at risk; disabled and single persons; and ways to create an enabling environment for the improved well-being of older people.

9. Seventy-nine persons from 18 countries, representing Governments, intergovernmental organizations, research institutions and international and national non-governmental organizations, participated in the two-day meeting. The workshop was the second organized jointly by the ECE secretariat and AARP. The first workshop dealt with the preparatory activities of the World Summit for Social Development.

10. Taking into account the fact that countries in the ECE region are experiencing dramatic population changes that pose unprecedented public policy challenges, especially with regard to the need to protect the well-being and income security of various groups of older persons, people with disabilities and single old women, there is a growing need to monitor closely the status of older people at risk and to provide policy makers with accurate and up-to-date data and analysis.

11. In that connection, a general conceptual framework of action was discussed and adopted at the meeting, covering the areas of general policy instruments; the difficulty of poverty measurements among older women and older groups at risk; creating an enabling environment; and issues of social security and the role of the private sector, as well as of the non-profit sector and government. Priorities for immediate action were identified; they include the necessity to develop methodologies for measuring, monitoring and analysing poverty among older men and women and other groups using primary and secondary data; promoting the establishment of national and international networks of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, research institutions, scholars and policy makers interested in furthering joint data collection, research and policy analysis efforts; acknowledging the role of older persons in the family and the informal economy; promoting the sharing of family responsibilities, particularly caring for dependents, between men and women; and adopting programmes that will facilitate the reintegration of disabled persons into society.

12. Governments were urged to prepare for the coming of an ageing society by viewing older persons as a potential resource for their societies and to plan for their reintegration into the labour market or as volunteers in the social sector. They were also encouraged to review periodically public old age pension systems and ensure that eligibility and financing mechanisms are in line with

the demographic structure, labour market conditions and the changing social and economic conditions of a country.

D. Disabled persons

13. With regard to disabled persons, the ECE secretariat carried out an operational programme on rehabilitation engineering. A publication on that subject was issued and circulated during the World Summit for Social Development.

E. Families in development

14. Another ECE four-year project supported by UNFPA, "Fertility and family surveys in countries of the ECE region", ended in 1996. The surveys were conducted on the basis of a common questionnaire containing various retrospective questions on vital aspects of life, such as childhood, partners, education and work. The following 20 countries have completed their field work: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United States of America. Several other countries may conduct surveys during 1997-1998, possibly as part of a second round of fertility and family surveys.

15. Under a successor project, "Sexual behaviour and reproductive health and fertility regulation", the ECE secretariat is currently completing the archiving of the standardized Fertility and Family Survey data files along with the work of standard tabulations, which will ensure that the data are internationally comparable, of high quality and easily accessible to researchers. In addition country studies are now being prepared by experts. In the next few years, selected scholars are expected to produce comparative studies as part of a comparative research programme launched in late 1996. The project is expected to make a major contribution to knowledge, and to provide an important source of information for policy makers on issues related to ongoing changes in the family; the interplay of work, education and parenting; contraceptive knowledge and practices; and other issues.

II. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

A. The regional Agenda for Action on Social Development

16. The regional Agenda for Action on Social Development, adopted by the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference in Preparation for the World Summit for Social Development (Manila, October 1994), reflects the regional consensus on social development priorities and policy and programme imperatives. Further support for the Agenda in the region has been extended by the Commission for Social Development in its resolution 51/4. The Agenda's primary focus is on the alleviation of poverty, which is recognized as the major scourge undermining the welfare and quality of life of large population groups within the region.

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17. The secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has focused its activities in pursuance of resolution 51/4 of the Commission for Social Development by providing technical assistance to members and associate members in support of their efforts to attain the goals and targets of the regional Agenda. Activities are being implemented to support national initiatives through policy-oriented research and programme analysis based on country, subregional and regional studies and demonstration projects; exchange of experience and expertise through the organization of conferences, seminars and training workshops; advisory services in support of national social development initiatives; and exchange of personnel and the provision of training opportunities through technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC). Those activities seek to identify and target the absolute poor, promote the social assessment of major development programmes, and improve national capacities and institutional frameworks for the effective implementation of the Agenda.

18. A regional workshop on the theme "Guidelines for the implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP region" was held at Bangkok in March 1996. As a follow-up, two publications are being prepared, one examining policy and programming issues and the other providing guidelines on the formulation of coherent national policies and programmes for the effective implementation of the Agenda.

19. Issues 34 and 35 of the Social Development Newsletter, focusing on social integration and poverty alleviation, respectively, have been prepared and disseminated. Issue 36 of the Newsletter, scheduled for distribution in April 1997, will focus on employment expansion. Thus, issues 34 to 36 of the Newsletter will review in the regional context the major themes developed at the World Summit for Social Development and elaborated in its Programme of Action.

20. The implementation of the regional Agenda and the promotion of policies and programmes for poverty alleviation through the enhancement of social security have received special attention. An expert group meeting, on the enhancement of social security for the poor was convened at Bangkok in November 1995. Subsequently, a document entitled "Towards social security for the poor in the Asia-Pacific region" (ST/ESCAP/1673), containing studies and recommendations on alternative policy programme options to enhance social security for the poor, was prepared and disseminated.

21. In compliance with resolution 51/4 of the Commission for Social Development, as well as with General Assembly resolution 50/161, entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development", ESCAP will convene the Fifth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Development. The Philippines has offered to host the Conference at Manila in November 1997. A network of government-designated focal points has been established to assist in the national and regional preparations for the Conference.

22. The ESCAP secretariat plans to convene an expert group meeting in May 1997 and a regional senior officials consultation in June 1997. In addition, a series of advisory missions and national workshops on the implementation of the regional Agenda for Action on Social Development will assist various countries

in the region in their preparations for the Ministerial Conference. To facilitate the participation of non-governmental organizations and the private sector in their preparatory activities for the Ministerial Conference, a non-governmental organizations/private sector forum will be held at Bangkok in October 1997. The ESCAP secretariat has also issued a document entitled, "Enhancement of the role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region" (ST/ESCAP/1625).

B. Youth

23. As a follow-up to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, ESCAP convened the Asia-Pacific Meeting on Human Resources Development for Youth at Beijing in October 1996. The Meeting was organized with the cooperation of the All-China Youth Federation. It reviewed the regional youth situation and examined national policies and programmes concerning youth in the light of the Jakarta Plan of Action on Human Resources Development in the ESCAP Region and the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. A series of recommendations for regional cooperation in priority areas of human resources development (HRD) for youth were formulated. The report and recommendations of the meeting constitute an important regional input to the United Nations World Youth Forum, held at Vienna in November 1996.

24. In recognition of the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year, the theme chosen for the 1995 ESCAP HRD Award was "HRD to promote productive employment for youth". The Social Work and Research Centre, better known as the Barefoot College, located at Tilonia, Rajasthan, India, was selected by a jury of international experts as the winner of the 1995 Award. The Award was presented at the fifty-second session of ESCAP. The ESCAP HRD Award is presented annually as a means of encouraging exemplary research and other innovative achievements in the field of HRD.

25. Training of trainers for youth participation in development continues to be a regular feature of ESCAP work. In 1996, a series of nine national workshops were held, involving key youth policy makers, youth leaders and trainers, to assist in building local capacity to promote constructive social participation of youth. On the basis of the experience gained during the national workshops, an HRD course for youth development will be offered on a regular basis, which could serve as a prototype for national training programmes for government and non-governmental organization personnel involved in the planning and delivery of skills development programmes for rural youth.

C. Ageing

26. The rapid ageing of societies in Asia and the Pacific, accompanied by the increasing proportion and absolute number of older persons in the population, has triggered concern for older persons in the region, while the economic and social impact of the ageing of populations poses a growing challenge to societies throughout the region.

27. In response to the need for a concerted effort to tackle the problem of ageing, the ESCAP secretariat has provided assistance to ESCAP member Governments in developing comprehensive national policies on ageing. Emphasis is placed on lifelong preparatory measures for old age. On the basis of a series of research studies on selected countries and a regional overview on lifelong preparation for old age in the region, a policy framework has been formulated to guide national policy and programme development for lifelong preparation for old age. This covers a spectrum of concerns ranging from income security and employment to health maintenance, education and housing. Following an expert consultation on the topic, the framework was adopted by a meeting of senior officials on a policy framework for lifelong preparation for old age, held at Bangkok in May 1996. A document reviewing the issues of old age, entitled "Lifelong preparation for old age in Asia and the Pacific" (ST/ESCAP/1684), was printed and distributed in November 1996.

28. To enhance public awareness of the major issues pertaining to ageing, the ESCAP secretariat updated and enlarged the "Annotated bibliography on policy and programme issues in the field of ageing" (ST/ESCAP/1471), which was first issued in 1994. Advisory service was provided by the ESCAP secretariat to a regional meeting of non-governmental organizations regarding issues pertaining to ageing and older persons, including lifelong preparation for old age.

29. Under the broad theme of cooperation between Governments and non-governmental organizations for poverty alleviation in the Asia and Pacific region, and in pursuance of General Assembly resolutions 47/5 and 50/141 on the proclamation and observance of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons, as well as Economic and Social Council resolution 1993/22 on strengthening national mechanisms on ageing, the ESCAP secretariat has initiated a project on the development of policies and programmes on behalf of older persons. Project activities include a workshop on government-non-governmental organizations cooperation for older persons, held in January 1996. The meeting brought together non-governmental organizations in the region to exchange experiences in working for older persons and discuss ways and means to enhance cooperation between Governments and non-governmental organizations for older persons. The recommendations from this workshop will be further considered at a forum of government and non-governmental representatives, to be held in July 1997.

30. In its continuing effort to promote and develop policies and programmes for older persons, the ESCAP secretariat is preparing a directory of national focal points on ageing in Asia and the Pacific; a directory of non-governmental organizations active in dealing with older persons in the region; and a bibliography of international and regional mandates and relevant documents concerning ageing and older persons. It is envisaged that those documents will be issued as a sourcebook on ageing and older persons in Asia and the Pacific.

D. Disabled persons

31. At its fifty-second session, in April 1996, ESCAP endorsed the targets and recommendations for the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, including the gender dimension. Thirty-one Governments of the region are signatories to the

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Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region. As a result of the ESCAP secretariat's efforts, several Governments are currently developing national disability legislation, while others are implementing such legislation. Similarly, increasing attention is being given to measures that improve disabled people's access to all services and infrastructure intended for the public, including public transportation, communications, education, skills development and employment. In support of the Asian and Pacific Decade, many ESCAP member Governments have committed themselves to regional cooperation activities, focusing on strengthening inter-sectoral coordination, inter-ministerial collaboration and monitoring of progress. There has been an increase in TCDC exchanges aimed at supporting the organizational development and participation of people with disabilities in the development process.

32. Through its technical cooperation trust fund for the activities of the Asian and Pacific Decade, ESCAP has supported the training and information activities of people with disabilities in the region's developing countries. A Pacific subregional workshop, held at Suva, Fiji, in February 1996, focused on developing linkages among, and strengthening the management of organizations of people with disabilities. ESCAP has also assisted in the development of the Cambodian Disabled People's Organization and in the convening of the first workshop of people with diverse disabilities in Viet Nam in October 1996.

33. A training workshop for women with disabilities, held at Bangkok in June 1995, generated documentation on the gender dimension of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons. As a follow-up, a publication on the problems faced by women with disabilities was issued and distributed at the Fourth World Conference on Women and at the accompanying Non-Governmental Organizations Forum, held at Beijing in September 1995. Follow-up activities by the trainees included the publication of a newsletter on the participation in the Beijing Forum and the convening of national workshops on gender issues in national disability movements.

34. ESCAP is providing technical assistance to three cities (Bangkok, Beijing and New Delhi) in the development of pilot projects to implement the ESCAP guidelines on the promotion of non-handicapping environments for disabled persons, which may be used as demonstration sites for TCDC activities. In addition, the city of Johor Bahru, Malaysia, has used the guidelines to incorporate barrier-free design in its urban renewal master plan. Through the intermediation of ESCAP, technical personnel from developing countries of the region participated in workshops on access promotion in Japan in 1995 and 1996.

35. With a view to improving the availability of assistive devices for poor persons with disabilities, ESCAP convened a regional workshop on the indigenous production and distribution of assistive devices in South India in September 1995. Preparation of a publication that will include a regional review and information on production methods for small workshops is under way.

36. Recent publications include: "Promotion of non-handicapping physical environments for disabled persons guidelines" (ST/ESCAP/1492); "Promotion of non-handicapping physical environments for disabled persons: case studies" (ST/ESCAP/1510); "Hidden sisters: women and girls with disabilities in the

Asian and Pacific region" (ST/ESCAP/1548); "Legislation on equal opportunities and full participation in development for disabled persons: a regional review" (ST/ESCAP/1622); and "Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons: action targets, gender dimensions" (ST/ESCAP/1669).

E. Human resources development

37. Some two thirds of the 900 million people the world over who lack access to basic reading and writing skills live in Asia, mostly in South Asia. Literacy levels are especially low among girls and women in South Asia, with serious implications for human resource development in the subregion. In collaboration with a number of non-governmental organizations, government agencies and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ESCAP has undertaken a series of HRD activities to promote literacy for girls and women in South Asia.

38. Under a project on cooperation between Government and non-governmental organizations to promote HRD for women in South Asia through post-literacy programme development, a post-literacy programme for women is being formulated in five countries of South Asia. A manual for developing post-literacy programmes for women, with special emphasis on vocational and functional skills to improve women's quality of life, will also be developed. Post-literacy programmes at the local level will be implemented by the national non-governmental organizations in each country. Another project on the promotion of literacy for women through capacity-building of local organizations in South-East Asia and the Pacific has undertaken a needs assessment and adaptation of literacy programmes to local needs, followed by the implementation of functional literacy programmes for women at the local level.

39. While rapid economic growth based largely on investment in human resources has facilitated a reduction of the proportion of the poor in some parts of the ESCAP region, inadequate investment in human resources has sustained and in some cases actually increased the concentration of the poor in other parts of the region. Against this background, the ESCAP secretariat has prepared three studies on promoting HRD services for the poor, focusing on various issues related to HRD as a means of poverty alleviation. The publications are based on materials presented at a regional training seminar on promoting HRD services for the poor, held at Manila in September 1995.

40. Many developing countries in the region have embarked on comprehensive rural development programmes to alleviate poverty. An important factor in the success of many of those programmes has been their emphasis on participation of the rural poor, not only in the identification of specific means of rural uplift but also in their design, planning, implementation and evaluation. In recognition of that achievement, the topic of people's participation in community development was selected as the theme of the 1996 ESCAP HRD Award. The winner of the 1996 Award will be selected by an independent jury in February 1997.

III. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

A. Social development and welfare

41. In response to the growing importance that Governments in the region attach to social issues, the Social Development Division and Statistics Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) jointly published, with the financial support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNFPA, the 1995 and 1996 editions of the Social Panorama of Latin America. Each edition provides a quantitative and qualitative analysis and information on various social issues, such as poverty, income distribution, employment, social spending, and equity. The 1995 edition was dedicated to issues related to family organization and poverty; child labour and its economic and social consequences; and the gender perspective, with special reference to women's access to paid employment and the importance of their contribution to household income. The edition also included a chapter on social policy issues in the sectors of health, education and social security, and an analysis of emerging themes, such as urban insecurity, violence and corruption. The 1996 edition includes a diagnosis and evaluation of programmes to alleviate poverty and an analysis of the main aspects of social integration programmes. Statistical data is based on household surveys.

42. Concerning social policy reform, several meetings were held and studies undertaken, leading to the publication of seven issues in the series Social Policies, dealing with topics such as educational systems, health policy reform and poverty programmes. Two regional expert meetings were held. The first meeting analysed the changes in the social structure of several countries in Latin America during the last decade, while the second meeting evaluated reforms in the areas of health, education, housing and social security. The meeting also identified policies to alleviate poverty, improve income distribution and increase employment and labour productivity.

43. With the financial support of the Government of the Netherlands, the ECLAC Statistics Division is currently working on a project concerning the diagnosis and evaluation of socio-economic progress in several Latin American countries and the impact of social policies. At the same time, with the support of the Organization of American States, the Division is implementing a joint programme on the social policies of Latin America. The aim of the project is to provide technical assistance and training in the formulation and evaluation of social programmes and projects. Regional courses, with a duration of four weeks, are held each year; the courses utilize a methodological cost-impact scheme appropriate for social projects.

44. In response to the World Summit for Social Development, which called on the regional commissions, in collaboration with intergovernmental organizations and other interested parties, to organize high-level meetings to evaluate follow-up to the Summit, ECLAC is exploring the possibility of holding a regional conference at Sao Paulo, Brazil, in April 1997, with the co-sponsorship of the Organization of American States, the United Nations Development Programme, the Inter-American Development Bank, UNICEF, the Pan American Health Organization/WHO, and the Latin American Economic System.

B. Youth

45. During 1995-1996, the ECLAC Social Development Division carried out a series of activities in support of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, in close collaboration with the Iberoamerican Youth Organization (OIJ). In particular, the Division participated in the design of a theoretical framework and discussion at a series of expert group meetings of the Regional Programme of Action for Youth Development in Latin America and its Operative Plan for 1996-1999. The Division also attended the Seventh Iberoamerican Conference of Youth Ministers (Buenos Aires, August 1996), at which the Plan was approved by member Governments.

46. The ECLAC Social Development Division held a seminar in April 1995 at ECLAC headquarters on youth opportunities for secondary education and employment in Chile. The research reports presented at that meeting were incorporated in the Social Policy series, numbers 8, 9, 10 and 11. The meeting assigned top priority to rural youth as one of the most disadvantaged youth sections in the region. In 1996, with the support of OIJ and UNICEF, the Division published a book in Spanish entitled Rural youth, modernity and democracy in Latin America. The Division also provided input to the Interregional Consultation on Rural Youth, held at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome in 1995, and provided training for rural youth workers in a seminar organized by the Rural Youth Network of the Southern Cone of South America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay); for the regional offices of FAO and UNFPA with rural youth reproductive health educators (Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Paraguay); and for youth researchers in Mexico.

C. Families in development

47. As a follow-up to the activities of the International Year of the Family, the ECLAC secretariat has formulated a set of indicators on the situation of families as a way to promote the development of sound policies aimed at strengthening the family. The 1995 and 1996 Social Panorama of Latin America, provide updated social indicators on families and households. The ECLAC secretariat also published a study entitled "Sobre revoluciones ocultas: la familia en Uruguay", as part of the project on human development, with the financial support of UNDP. And in 1995, the ECLAC Social Development Division distributed in both Spanish and English the publication Family and Future: A Regional Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean, and kept close contacts with relevant organizations of the region.

48. Finally, ECLAC participated in meetings organized by the academic community, such as the Third Iberoamerican Conference on the Family, organized by the University of Vale do Rios Sinos in Brazil in 1995; the seminar on the family held by the Universidad de Concepción in Chile in May 1996; and an international seminar on the Latin American realities of families, organized by the Universidad de Concepción in October 1996.

IV. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

A. Social development and welfare

49. In view of the growing need to exchange information and ideas on how best to promote human or socially centred development policies and strategies in the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) region, the ECA secretariat has continued to collaborate closely with intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies and other international institutions, by hosting and conducting a number of meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops dealing with a range of issues related to social development in the region. In addition, the ECA secretariat has undertaken studies and produced a number of technical publications on social issues.

50. Great emphasis has been placed by the ECA secretariat on the central role of people's participation in the development of human resources and social transformation. Accordingly, the ECA secretariat has supported various activities of non-governmental organizations and has assisted community-based people's organizations to develop and implement participatory projects and programmes in various African countries. One such initiative was the launching of the report Human Development in Africa, which is the main vehicle for reporting on the trends and developments relating to social and human development in Africa. The report highlights significant human development issues and reviews progress achieved and setbacks encountered in the implementation of commitments made to improve human endeavour in Africa. The themes explored in the report include goals for the child, health for all and basic education for all.

51. The Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Human Development, in conjunction with the follow-up Ministerial Committee of Fifteen, is playing a catalytic role in the implementation of the various recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development. Following extensive discussions on the 1995 issue of Human Development in Africa, the follow-up Committee of Fifteen agreed that its next issue should include measurable indicators to assess the progress made in advancing social development at the country level. The report also serves as a tool for inter-agency monitoring at the regional level.

52. As part of its overall efforts, the ECA secretariat continues to promote socio-economic development in the region. In that connection, two publications, Report on the Economic and Social Situation in Africa 1995, and Economic and Social Survey of Africa, 1994/1995, analysing the social conditions in the region, have been prepared by the ECA secretariat. In addition, seminars on the social impact of structural adjustment programmes have been held in cooperation with the Arab Research Centre at Cairo and the National School of Administration and Magistracy at Yaoundé, Cameroon, in 1995. Particular emphasis was placed on providing assistance to ECA member States in the planning, development and utilization of human resources through workshops, seminars and training. In cooperation with the African Women in Crisis Umbrella Programme of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the ECA secretariat organized a conference on the theme "Legal status of refugee and internally displaced women in Africa".

53. A joint project with UNICEF led to the publication of the Atlas of the African Child in 1995, as a follow-up to the consensus of Dakar, the World Summit for Children and the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa. The Atlas graphically focuses attention on the myriad problems facing African children; its main message is that developing human capabilities and meeting the basic needs of the child are the prerequisites and cornerstones to sustainable human development in Africa.

54. With regard to health problems, a senior policy seminar on the social impact of HIV/AIDS in households and families in Africa provided an important forum for experts, policy makers and practitioners to examine the socio-economic and cultural impact of HIV/AIDS on household families, the individual and society at large. In addition, the experts assessed the impact of known HIV/AIDS preventive strategies, such as condom promotion, sensitization campaigns and the control of sexually transmitted diseases, and suggested other practical strategies that could be used to halt the rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa.

B. Youth

55. Youth represent approximately 19 per cent of the African population, a figure that is expected to increase given the present rate of population growth. It is clear, therefore, that youth represent a vast potential for human resource development in Africa, particularly when viewed in the light of the adverse socio-economic circumstances prevailing in the region. Accordingly, the ECA secretariat organized jointly with the Commonwealth Youth Programme Africa Centre a regional expert group meeting on youth, drugs and health. The findings of the meeting indicate that the scope of the drug problem and consequent health hazards have not spared the African region. The scourge of drug addiction has spread progressively throughout the continent, threatening all segments of society, especially young people. Illegal drug production and trafficking is expanding as an increasing number of African countries serve as production and transit points. Moreover, available data demonstrate that while sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) occur among the sexually active population as a whole between 15 and 49 years of age, the incidence of STDs among youth (15-25) is particularly high and is increasing rapidly.

C. Families in development

56. The ECA secretariat has prepared a paper entitled, "The impact of political conflicts and instability on social progress and cohesion in Africa with emphasis on the family". The paper points out that although there are many factors that give rise to conflicts in Africa, the most important are unequal development and gross disparities among different communities within the same country; absence of democratic process; the inability of States to guarantee the security of persons; and various exogenous factors. The paper maintains that the roots of violence in Africa are to be found in power politics, traditional tribal rivalries and personal vendettas. Since the family is the basic social unit for nurturing and educating children, and is very often the victim of

violence, the paper stressed the need to do everything possible to protect families both during and after periods of conflict, such as civil wars.

57. Assistance in the form of substantive inputs was also provided by the ECA secretariat to the African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development, and the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders. ECA also participated in the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, held at Cairo from 28 April to 8 May 1995.

V. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

A. Social development and welfare

58. As a result of investment in building the infrastructure for social services in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region over the past two decades, social development indicators have shown a steady growth in terms of improved health services and a quantitative increase of educational output and nutrition. Nevertheless, the region has registered a decline in the overall social situation. Apart from political factors, the situation has been exacerbated by a combination of relatively high fertility rates, high rates of unplanned urbanization (rural/urban migration), and poor educational systems that do not properly equip graduates to obtain productive employment. Those developments have led to a worsening of the problems of unemployment and poverty in the region.

59. The past decade has brought a shift in approach to public service delivery. Services are increasingly provided in a piecemeal fashion in an attempt to contain a growing urban crisis. Provisions are motivated by pressure to meet the needs of an increasing population while adhering to cost constraints. The predominant feature of the past decade has been an attempt for the public sector to withdraw from the provision of housing and services, resulting in a marked drop in the standard, quality and frequency of the distribution of services. Since the late 1980s, the structural adjustment policies adopted under stringent macroeconomic conditions in such countries as Egypt and Jordan have been paving the way for privatizing public services. It is not yet clear how those measures are affecting the cost, quality and standards of the services delivered and what their ultimate impact will be on people's living standards and quality of life. Nonetheless, a rise in the level of urban poverty has already been noted in such countries that seems to coincide with the downward trend in the provision of basic amenities to the public.

60. With regard to unemployment, the present trend to privatize the public sector in an effort to reduce dependence on the welfare state has further exacerbated the unemployment situation, especially given the high growth rate of the youth population. More people will be released from long-standing government employment, with low levels of skills that do not allow them to find jobs in the private sector. Privatization in particular and structural adjustment policies in general may be economically feasible, but their negative social consequences are enormous. At the same time, globalization of the world economy contributes to the vulnerability of uncompetitive enterprises and can

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lead to additional unemployment. Those developments have given rise to double-digit unemployment rates for the region as a whole during the 1990s. Unemployment rates in non-oil producing countries are among the highest in the world, with real wages falling more rapidly than in any other region and the average worker earning no more in real terms than he did in the early 1970s. The deterioration in wages occurred even though massive investment in human capital outpaced that of any other region. With unemployment persisting in most countries of the region in the past decade and with no solution in sight, the situation will eventually result in long-term unemployment.

61. To summarize, ESCWA countries are facing a vast number of emerging challenges involving labour market problems related to labour absorption; the restructuring of education; the creation of productive employment opportunities; structural imbalances in the labour market of each country; underemployment in the public sector; rehabilitation of the unemployed, especially those who suffered from long-term unemployment; integration of new entrants to the labour markets, especially youth; restructuring and downsizing of the public sector; and increasing pressures to pursue market-based growth paths and to open to the global economy. Solving those problems will require adopting a new approach to human capital that differs vastly from the past, and such solutions are unlikely to be found at the country level. The trend to globalize the international economy implies open access to large markets but at the same time increases global competition.

62. On the question of poverty, it should be noted that, apart from political factors such as wars and internal conflicts and the poor management of the financial and human resources, which play a major role in increasing poverty, the spread of poverty in the region has also been the result of several socio-economic factors that have developed over time, including high rates of population growth that have not been matched by adequate economic growth; chaotic rural migration to urban centres, coupled with the development of urban slum areas; and lack of employment opportunities for new entrants to the labour market. Moreover, a combination of poor income distribution and ineffective safety nets has led to the further spread of poverty.

63. The current situation in many countries is one of increased economic difficulties, deteriorating social sectors and soaring unemployment. Those developments have led to the impoverishment of the middle class and the creation of a new group of poor, adding to the complexity of defining the poor and poverty of the region. The problems generated by the new category of poor will require specific policies and measures. In certain respects, they are very different from the traditional poor in that they tend to be better educated, generally healthy, have smaller families, and are possibly more employable with properly guided retraining programmes.

64. Other social ills currently confronting the region are related to crime, family disintegration, drug abuse, and the marginalization and alienation of certain social groups. Although the magnitude of such problems is still small compared with the situation in other regions, the fact it has grown at a rapid rate during the past decade warrants special attention. The spread and growth of such social problems is directly linked to the rise in poverty and lack of job opportunities. Poverty, coupled with the inability to find a proper job,

can result in frustrations that lead to extremism and violence, hence social instability. As such, a new social contract that conforms to the new global realities is needed to alleviate poverty and unemployment.

65. In order to address those complex social problems, ESCWA has increasingly given top priority to social issues, just as it does to economic matters. In the area of poverty alleviation, the ESCWA secretariat has undertaken a number of technical studies on the concept, measurement and determinants of poverty in Western Asia. In a study on poverty measurement, ESCWA is developing a poverty estimation model based on private consumption, nutritional intake, enrolment in primary education, and the infant mortality rate in the countries of the region. Based on that model, the percentage of the population in various countries has been estimated for 1992. A second regional study, entitled "Poverty in Western Asia: a social perspective", provides a poverty profile for the region, with analysis on the extent, nature and causes of poverty. The study singles out four issues to assess their correlation to poverty: population dynamics, employment, health and education. It also identified groups of people most affected by poverty.

66. The ESCWA secretariat has undertaken several poverty profiles for countries or areas in the region, including for Iraq, Lebanon, and the West Bank and Gaza. Once the country profiles and sectoral studies are completed, emphasis will shift to the evaluation of policy measures adopted by ESCWA member States to combat poverty. The final stage (1998-1999 biennium) will be devoted to proposing operational policies aimed at eradicating poverty in the region.

67. Regarding issues related to social integration, ESCWA has concentrated its efforts on enhancing local community development in selected rural areas of Syria and Egypt through the mobilization of local capabilities and the participation of available human resources. The project is supported by the United Nations Volunteers and the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND). A final evaluation was made in November 1996, with prospects for expansion to include other countries in the region, such as Lebanon. Several studies and lessons learned from the implementation of the project will be issued in due course.

68. The ESCWA secretariat provides technical assistance and support to Governments in establishing sustainable human development networks. In addition, it provides backstopping to Governments to prepare national human development reports. The ESCWA Human Development Section is implementing with the United Nations Development Programme a project entitled "Preparatory assistance for regional support of national efforts in pursuit of sustainable human resources". The project aims to implement the concept of sustainable human development through supporting national efforts to adopt and implement the concepts and methodologies of SHD. The main goals of the project are to support national efforts in pursuit of sustainable human development and to establish a mechanism for the exchange of information and experiences in that field at the national and regional levels; to participate in the dissemination of information on successful experiences in sustainable human development and the theoretical evolution of the concept and methodology of SHD; and to establish an Arab strategy for sustainable human development and formulate a programme for the implementation of that strategy.

69. To achieve those goals, the following activities have been planned: creating national networks on sustainable human development in at least four countries; engaging concerned governmental institutions and scientific research centres, and establishing a regional sustainable human development network; holding two workshops on successful practical experiences in SHD, the first at Cairo on the report of the Egyptian human development experience held in May 1995, the second at Khartoum on community development; and publishing six specialized studies on sustainable human development in the Arab world.

B. Disabled persons

70. In the area of social integration and as a follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, ESCWA has promoted the study of disability-related activities towards disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons. A study entitled "The situation of disabled women: their marginalization and measures for social integration in the ESCWA region" was issued to that end.

71. ESCWA has opened the Arab Regional Computer Training Centre for Blind Women at Amman. The ongoing project is organized in collaboration with the Regional Centre for Rehabilitation and Training for Blind Girls at Amman, with funding provided by AGFUND and the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability, and with support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency. The project aims to upgrade the literacy levels of blind women and train them in basic computer skills in order to enhance their employment opportunities.

72. Another disability-related programme activity is the updating of the bibliography on disability issues in the Arab region, which was published in 1989. The bibliography is being processed on the Integrated Scientific Information System programme, and will be published in 1997.

C. Families in development

73. The structure of the Arab family has been undergoing radical transformation. Armed conflicts and political disturbances, rapid urbanization, industrialization, migration, new technologies and access to information have led to a gradual erosion of traditional social values and norms. Socio-economic factors, including the growing participation of women in the labour force, have had their impact on the fabric of the family in the region, contributing to the rise of the nuclear family and changing attitudes and values that affect relations among family members. The extended family is giving way to the nuclear family, in both urban and in rural areas due to internal and external migration. Despite that change, an alternative to the traditional family as a social institution and as a source of cohesion and support within the society has not emerged, although some of its functions are being assumed by other entities.

74. While traditional family forms remain the norm in much of the region, changing social and economic realities have imposed increasing pressure among family members in recent decades. Those changes are posing difficult challenges for the Arab family and for policy makers concerned with maintaining social

stability and cohesion. Such challenges include the weakening of family ties due partially to spatial mobility; gradual shifting away from extended to nuclear and more flexible family forms; an increasing emphasis on individual rather than communitarian social values; and a redefining of the traditional roles and expectations of individual family members, particularly those of women as caregivers, towards more egalitarian and task-sharing partnerships within the family.

75. During the current biennium, family issues are being addressed separately and within the framework of other activities: a database is to be built on policies and measures to address the impact of current social changes on women and the family in the region, and a publication entitled Annotated Bibliography on Arab Women and the Family: A Critical Assessment is to be issued.

76. As a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the International Year of the Family, an operational regional programme for action was formulated to further the advancement of Arab women and cement ties within the Arab family. Towards that end, an Arab conference on formulating a regional programme for action and follow-up mechanism was convened one year after the Fourth World Conference on Women at Amman from 25 to 29 September 1996. The Arab conference adopted a programme of action identifying concrete projects in three areas of critical concern to Arab women and the family: poverty, decision-making and family issues. Activities under the family theme fall under the umbrella of alleviating women's poverty through their empowerment, and include a survey of female-headed households on the feasibility of setting up micro-credit lending facilities for poor women in rural and urban areas and for female single-headed households; and studying the changing values of youth in families, with a focus on identity crisis in conflict-stricken areas in the region.
