



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY H.E. AMBASSADOR JOHN W. ASHE, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, AT THE 46TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (New York, 7 February 2008)**

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies and distinguished Delegates,

1. On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, allow me to extend to you, Excellency and the members of the bureau, our sincere congratulations on your election to lead the important work of this 46th session of the Commission for Social Development. Let me assure you that the G77 and China will work cooperatively toward a successful conclusion of this policy segment designed to produce concrete action-oriented strategies on the priority theme: 'Promoting full employment and decent work for all'.

2. We would like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her statement delivered yesterday at the opening session. The G77 and China is pleased to know that we share her vision of a United Nations that embraces a strong global economic and social development agenda. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China wishes to express its full confidence in the work of the Commission for Social Development and its role as the key United Nations body responsible for the follow-up and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. We fully support the Commission in its efforts to guide the work of the broader UN development community and the global dialogue on social development.

Mr. Chairman,

3. We thank the Secretary-General for the reports submitted under agenda item 3: Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly. The report on the priority theme contained in document (E/CN.5/2008/4), points to several distressing developments in employment and the world of work.

4. Approximately 1.5 billion or one-third of the working age population, were either unemployed or underemployed in 2006. This is despite global economic growth of roughly 3.8 per cent per annum during the period 1996-2006. We are told that this phenomenon called 'jobless growth' is a result of macroeconomic policies that do not adequately address employment creation. Simply stated, it is not enough merely to make jobs available.

5. Approximately 84 per cent of the global labour force is found in developing countries, often with non-existing or nascent unemployment protection mechanisms. Faced with these circumstances, the average person in the developing world cannot afford to be unemployed. The resulting poverty and social exclusion strip people of their dignity and prevent them from being able to care for themselves and their families.

6. Employment generation, therefore, is a means of meeting the basic needs of our citizens. However, employment generation by itself is not the panacea. While we agree that employment generation needs to be at the center of macroeconomic policy and fully integrated into national development strategies including poverty reduction strategies, decent work, characterized by

conditions of equity, equality, security and dignity, has to be a hallmark of these strategies if individuals are to enjoy personal dignity and if the United Nations development agenda and internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, are to be achieved.

Mr. Chairman,

7. The Group of 77 and China shares the view that it is essential to support an integrated approach to full employment and decent work that looks at investing in new and productive jobs in growing sectors of the economy as well as improving existing jobs through building capacity in sectors where the majority of people are employed.

8. The informal economy accounts for a substantial share of employment in developing countries with between 50 and 70 per cent of workers engaged in informal work. However, many of the jobs are characterized by low pay, income insecurity and lack of employment benefits. Governments can address these concerns by creating an enabling environment for enterprise development in both rural and urban areas, including by pursuing policies that support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperatives and other forms of social enterprises. Self-help initiatives such as cooperatives tend to be overlooked as an option for creating productive employment opportunities among various social groups, especially in areas where public and private sector initiatives are absent.

9. In some parts of the world, increased flexibility in work and contractual arrangements is a welcome trend in employment, particularly for women who may need to balance work and family responsibilities. Collective agreements can also provide a better balance of flexibility and security for the worker. The G77 and China acknowledges the importance of pursuing the development and effective enforcement of appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks that address conditions of employment.

Mr. Chairman,

10. We welcome the Commission's continued focus on women, youth, older persons and persons with disabilities. The Group of 77 and China rejects discrimination of any kind against these members of society, whose contributions are essential to achieving the MDGs.

11. Youth employment has been identified as an emerging issue not previously elaborated in Copenhagen in 1995. Young people represent 25 per cent of the working age population but account for half of the unemployed. It is crucial to develop strategies to improve youth employment prospects. Prolonged unemployment of youth can increase their risk of exposure to violence as well as perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Promoting the participation of youth in the design of policies that affect them, in accordance with their capacities; facilitating access to job and skills training opportunities; and promoting entrepreneurship are all measures that can channel the energy, creativity and potential of youth into productive pursuits.

12. This year concludes the first review and appraisal cycle of the Madrid International Plan on Ageing. We support efforts to integrate the concerns of older persons into national development agendas.

13. We also welcome the latest news on the status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and look forward to its coming into force in the very near future.

14. National efforts to promote the sustainable reconstruction and restoration of livelihoods and

employment in war-torn, conflict-affected and disaster-stricken countries and countries under foreign occupation, should be given priority and should receive support from the international community through appropriate cooperation and coordination with national authorities, including through national capacity building.

Mr. Chairman,

15. The World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly showed the significance of employment creation and decent work for poverty eradication and social integration. This important relationship was reiterated in the Millennium Declaration and at the 2005 World Summit when world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the goal of full and productive employment and decent work as an important element of the efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, in particular, eradicating poverty. This was followed by yet another commitment in July 2006 at the High Level Segment of the Economic and Social Council, to create an environment at the national and international levels, conducive to generating full and productive employment and decent work for all.

16. These are not merely lofty commitments made on the international stage. They have been reinforced at the regional and hemispheric levels.

17. In April 2007, the 11th ILO African Regional Meeting, further defined the steps that Member States and development partners need to take to make decent work an explicit and central objective of economic and social policies at the national, regional and continental levels, thus providing an effective way to reduce poverty in a sustainable fashion, and to improving the living conditions of people on the African continent.

18. In Asia, several countries have developed national action plans that prioritize time-bound policies and programmes for the realization of a coherent and integrated decent work agenda.

19. In September 2007, Ministers of Labour of the Americas recommitted to a range of proposals on labour and employment in follow-up to the declaration of Heads of State and Government at the 2005 Fourth World Summit of the Americas.

20. Since 2006, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean have established 'decades for decent work' to accelerate progress toward realizing economic growth with quality employment and social protection. The end of the observance of the decades will coincide with the 2015 aim for realizing the MDG targets.

21. While there is no shortage of expressions of commitment, the challenge is to translate political commitments into programmes and policies to bring about concrete progress. Even with the most forward-looking domestic programmes in place, all will be for naught without a conducive international environment to support their realization. Enhanced international cooperation, including fulfillment of commitments for internationally agreed official development assistance, debt relief and technical support, are critical to our efforts.

22. Globalization has had a tremendous influence on labour markets. While there have been differences in experiences, developing countries need to be given adequate policy space to determine the areas in which they can exercise some comparative advantage in the global competition for goods and services, thereby mitigating any uneven benefits or costs associated with globalization. In this regard, issues relating to market access, terms of trade and investment, among others, are crucial to the next round of international trade talks.

23. At the 2006 ECOSOC High-Level Segment, there were calls for United Nations funds, programmes and agencies, and financial institutions to mainstream the goals of full and productive employment and decent work in their policies, programmes and activities. It has been suggested that one of the ways in which this can be operationalized is through integration into country programmes and development projects that are financed by regional and multilateral financial institutions, targeting poverty reduction and rural and community development. In this way, 'decent work country programmes' (DWCPs) can be used as vehicles for supporting national development efforts. They can also provide the framework for bilateral collaboration and for contributing to country policies and programmes through the UN system.

In conclusion,

24. Poverty eradication, productive employment and social inclusion are the three pillars along the path to sustainable human-centered development identified in 1995 by the World Summit for Social Development. To that end, it is most important to the Group of 77 and China that the process in which we are engaged formulates an outcome with a substantive set of actions and objectives that will provide strong policy direction to member States and the international community that can be implemented at all levels. It should also have a built-in follow-up mechanism that allows us to track our progress. The G77 and China looks forward to contributing our thoughts and ideas over the next several days to that process.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.