

Statement by Ambassador June A. Persaud on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on the occasion of the Special Meeting of the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council to bid farewell to H.E. Mr. Juan Somavia, President of the Council

New York, 19 January 1999

Mr. President
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

At this special meeting of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, convened in tribute and farewell to H. E. Mr. Juan Somavia, outgoing President of the Council, I take the floor on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, in recognition of the distinguished contribution of Ambassador Somavia not only to the work of ECOSOC, but to the promotion of development issues throughout the length and breadth of the United Nations, during his many years of service in our midst.

We have come to know him over the last nineteen years as a persistent advocate for the causes of his beloved country, an eloquent voice for those who could not speak, a skilled negotiator for social and economic justice, a foot soldier in the fight for the betterment of people. His inclusive and multifaceted approach to issues have brought him renown as a mediator and consensus builder. His vision and patient dedication to the wider goals of this Organization have been rewarded with success and achievement over an extended period of outstanding performance. That he has prevailed in this highest international forum, and has all the while retained an inspiring enthusiasm and conviction for the promotion of the development needs of the broad membership of the United Nations, itself testifies to the genuineness of his work as a diplomat. He has earned fame as a lobbyist of the first order and has matched this with a reputation of equal calibre as a host of great charm and wit, whose warmth and generosity remain with his guests long after the festivities have ended.

It was Ambassador Somavia's initiative, we may recall, which spawned the concept for the World Summit on Social Development. He gave himself in tireless pursuit of a successful outcome for this historic event through his role as Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Summit, and saw its realization in Copenhagen in 1995. His tenacity and perseverance in increasing awareness, building support and promoting partnerships for the improvement of the social welfare and development of the world's most needy and impoverished peoples are a matter of record. His seminal contribution to the Summit was well received by our membership, and was indeed the fulfillment of our own high expectations of him following on his work as Chairman of the Third Committee in 1990/1991.

As the President of the Economic and Social Council in 1993 and 1998, and as the Council's Vice President in 1991, 1992 and 1997, we have had the benefit of his counsel and his vision, and have worked in the spirit of inclusiveness and transparent representation which he inspires. The depth of his own experience in the promotion of the social and economic welfare of developing countries, both within the United Nations system and in bilateral, regional and international contexts, has enriched the process of our own work in the ECOSOC and broadened the spectrum of our achievements.

That we must now bid him farewell from this house would in itself be reason for more sombre commemoration, were it not for the fact that Ambassador Somavia moves up to a vantage point from where he can be of even more service to the causes for which he has worked so tirelessly and with such creativity and insight over the last two decades. We believe that his election to the post of Director General of the International Labour Organisation is a fitting tribute to the depth of his consistent advocacy for the betterment of labouring masses the world over. His solid knowledge and experience in political and civil society, his enviable negotiating skills in bilateral, multilateral and international fora, and his broad based grasp of the

