

Statement by Ambassador June Persaud, Guyana Delegation, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, at the 37th session of the Commission on Social Development on Agenda Item 3(a)(ii): "Initiation of the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development"

New York, 17 February 1999

Mr. Chairman,

It is my honour to speak at this time on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on Agenda Item 3 (a)(ii) Initiation of the Overall Review of the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development. As I begin my remarks, I would wish to acknowledge the two reports of the Secretary General on this priority theme, which have in their expansiveness and inclusiveness, provided a useful background against which the Commission's consideration of this issue has unfolded over the last two days. I would also wish to recognise the contributions made by country delegations and NGOs alike, all of which have served to raise the level of our discussion and to clarify in large measure the way forward.

The World Summit for Social Development in which we participated some four years ago, represented a communal stocktaking and subsequent commitment on the part of the global community to the improvement of social development for the peoples of the world. The Group of 77 and China participated in that Summit with seriousness and purpose and has since pursued the goals of the Summit with equal dedication and vigour. We are convinced that a review of our collective progress in fulfilment of the Summit commitment is not only appropriate, but imperative at this time, if we are to remain engaged in the task and stay the course that we set ourselves in 1995.

It is clear that since Copenhagen, many national governments have significantly increased the priority attached to social development, and have adopted creative and innovative means for improving the social welfare of their populations. This priority has even found its way into the development agendas of many international organisations, whose increasing awareness of social concerns, has contributed in no small measure to a more seamless application of programmes which are conceptually more holistic. These encouraging developments notwithstanding, we must recognize, in any assessment we undertake, that the social development of the world's people has deteriorated since 1995.

Statistics confirm the growing numbers who live in abject poverty, for whom access to basic social services are still restricted and whose participation in national economic development continues to be marginal. Those most affected remain women, children, indigenous people, refugees, the elderly and the disabled. Their right to a full and meaningful life is severely curtailed, and as human capital, they are incapable of making a contribution to the overall development of their countries. We have over the last four years seen countries continue to struggle over the paucity of resources for development activities of all kinds, including social welfare, and we have more recently witnessed the social disintegration of once prospering populations as a result of the South East Asian financial crisis.

What is clear, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that national governments do not alone control all of the circumstances which ultimately determine the welfare of their peoples, though there is a recognisably important role which they play in guiding policies and allocating resources. Our review of the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development, must acknowledge not only that progress in social development has been less than anticipated, but that ground has been lost in areas which were not previously considered vulnerable. Our review must also recognise that development cannot be compartmentalized, neither within countries, nor among countries. Thus, unless development takes place in an holistic manner, the Copenhagen goals of social development will remain beyond our reach.

It is on this basis, Mr. Chairman, that the Group of 77 and China reiterates its call for the building of a genuine partnership between the stakeholders in the World Social Summit. We reiterate our call for an enabling environment for social development, not only at the national level, but at the international level as well. In this latter regard, we see declining levels of ODA, international debt burdens, deteriorating terms of international trade, and the marginalizing effects of globalization, as major impediments to strong developing country partners in the Copenhagen compact for social development.

Our review of the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development would be an exercise in futility unless we are prepared to confront the causes behind our slow progress in implementing the Summit goals. We believe that this exercise must be grounded in reality, that we must be engaged in the review and in the further initiatives, as stakeholders and partners in a common destiny. We are optimistic that such a process is possible, and anticipate working for a productive review and for renewed engagement in the tasks we set ourselves at Copenhagen. Our capacity to progress, we believe, resides in our ability to engage each other in a constructive partnership. To this Mr. Chairman, the Group of 77 and China is committed.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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