

STATEMENT BY MRS. PRIANTI GAGARIN DJATMIKO SINGGH ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BEFORE THE GENERAL SEGMENT OF ECOSOC ON AGENDA ITEM 10: REGIONAL COOPERATION

New York, 20 July 1998

Mr. President,

Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China to thank Mr. K.Y. Amoako, for his informative and concise remarks introducing the agenda item on regional cooperation. I would also like to express our appreciation to the five Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions for enlightening us on the reform measures undertaken in each respective Regional Commission as well as on the latest developments in economic and social cooperation in their respective regions this morning.

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China I would first like to reiterate the importance of the role of the regional commissions in the whole spectrum of the United Nations system in its economic and social field. This role has significantly increased in importance with the rapid growth in globalization. The regional commissions are required to ensure that the process of globalization helps rather than hinders the economies in their respective region. We therefore welcome the growing opportunities presented by the ECOSOC to interact with the regional commissions so on developments within their regions.

This year, we are very fortunate in having the Executive Secretaries directly address us. On 12 March, the five Executive Secretaries first informally briefed us within the context of ECOSOC on the reforms they have already undertaken and continue to take in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 50/227 and ECOSOC resolution 1996/41. Secondly, on 15 May, in the framework of the ECOSOC session on the follow up of Major UN conferences and summits, a panel discussion was held with the Executive Secretaries of the Commissions on their regional implementation. These two venues provided us with a unique opportunity to gain a first hand exposure at this highest level on the activities of Regional Commissions. In fact, in our deliberations on the reform of Regional Commissions, the Group of 77 and China agreed with other groupings that these periodic visits of the Executive Secretaries are desirable as they provide us with a unique means of dialogue with the Regional Commissions whose voices are seldom heard in the corridors of the United Nations in New York.

Our deliberations on the item of Regional Cooperation are guided by the excellent Report of the Secretary General on the "Regional Commissions in the Context of a Programme of Reform of the United Nations" and its three addenda. The report deals predominantly with the reform process of the regional Commissions. Therefore, this year our annual discussion on Regional Cooperation will inevitably be intertwined with, and indeed dominated by the reform of the Regional Commissions as called for by General Assembly resolutions 50/227 of 24 May 1996 and 52/12B of 19 December 1997. In these resolutions the Assembly requested the Council to undertake a review of the mandates, composition, functions and working methods of its functional commissions, expert groups and bodies and of the regional commissions.

Let me therefore touch first upon the reform process in which ECOSOC has given guidance in its review of the regional commissions. If we may recall that last year, the ECOSOC already reviewed, the progress of the reform process already under way in all five Regional Commissions as stipulated in Resolution 50/227. Addenda one of the Secretary General's Report updates this reform process which is still ongoing in some Regional Commissions. The Group of 77 and China considers the internal reform process, as driven by the legislative bodies in each Regional Commissions, to be an important aspect of the whole reform process of the United Nations system. The reform process mandated by GA resolutions, 50/227 and 52/12B, must therefore be already undertaken by the Regional Commissions. I am therefore pleased to note that the main

paper of the Secretary General in this respect concentrates mainly on issues of coordination including those focusing on the distribution of tasks between the activities at headquarters, regional and national levels that are carried out by the United Nations based on the most appropriate division of labor.

It is difficult to deny that there is an urgent need for more coordinated activities at the regional level and that there should be close cooperation between the Regional Commissions and the global bodies of the United Nations system, especially with the funds and programmes, but also with other relevant regional bodies, so as to avoid undue overlapping and duplication. Therefore, we support the proposal inviting the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions to participate in meetings of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Group. In this context, we also support the active participation of Regional Commissions in the ongoing and review of UNDAF.

Mr. President,

Twenty years ago the General Assembly adopted resolution 32/197 which inter alia called upon the Regional Commissions to provide leadership and responsibility for coordination and cooperation in their respective regions. This role is as important as ever and our entire reform process of the United Nations is guided by the principle of streamlining and the avoidance of duplication. It is therefore important that the team leadership role of the Regional Commissions be recognized so as to minimize duplication at the regional level. In this context, we welcome the proposal in the Secretary-General's paper to strengthen the team leadership role by scheduling coordination meetings within each region between the Regional Commissions and the United Nations Funds and Programmes engaged in regional activities and which would be chaired by the Deputy Secretary General. In order to minimize budgetary implications, we are encouraged that the UN bodies are to be represented by their regional heads. After all, it is these regional heads who are in intimate contact with the regional commissions.

The paper now before us as well as the recent series of discussions with the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions bring into sharper focus the dual role of the Regional Commissions. First, the commissions are the regional outposts of the United Nations which carry out programs and activities in support of the global mission of the United Nations. And, secondly they are the regional expressions of the United Nations and constitute an integral part of the institutional landscape of their respective geographic areas. Both of these roles are important. In fact, this dual role came under scrutiny in General Assembly Resolution 52/12B which called for the review of "the core competencies of the Regional Commissions vis-a-vis global bodies and other intergovernmental bodies...".

The Group of 77 and China support both roles of the Regional Commissions. Indeed, the first role or function of the commissions was highlighted this year in the in-depth discussion on the Regional follow-up to major UN conferences and summits held last May. Clearly, because of their critical mass and their interdisciplinary and multi sectoral capacities, Regional Commissions constitute important tools for the follow up to global conferences.

As to the second role of the Regional Commissions, the Group of 77 and China wish to stress the importance of cooperation between the Commissions and the regional bodies. This cooperation should not be confined to economic only bodies but where they exist, it should also involve cooperation with other regional groupings.

The Group of 77 and China are particularly interested in fostering South-South cooperation through the cooperation of sub-regional groupings. Many of these groupings were created either as a direct result of initiatives by the Regional Commissions, or with their close cooperation and support. And, many of these groupings have small secretariats and continue to rely on Regional Commissions to support them in their efforts to strengthen the cooperation between these regional/sub-regional groupings. In this regard, the Indonesian Government is hosting a High-Level Meeting in Bali in December and we have already requested

the Regional Commissions to actively participate in this meeting.

With regard to the type of activities undertaken by the Regional Commissions, we believe that fostering regional cooperation and integration is their major function. Because of their interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach, the Regional Commissions fall within both categories of normative tasks which carry analytical and norm setting functions as well as operational activities which provide technical assistance, project execution and training. The Group of 77 and China consider both of these categories of activities undertaken by the Regional Commissions as of the utmost importance and thus we are convinced that they must go hand in hand and must be mutually supportive. Both roles are indispensable for the Regional Commissions and it would be very difficult to see an effective separation of the normative and analytical tasks of the organization from the operational work with each role being performed by separate units of the UN family.

Thank you Mr. President.