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THIRD COMMITTEE
16th meeting
held on
Tuesday, 13 October 1981
at 10.30 a.m.
New York

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 16th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. O'DONOVAN (Ireland)

later : Mrs. MASMOUDI (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 76: INTERNATIONAL YOUTH YEAR: PARTICIPATION, DEVELOPMENT, PEACE: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/36/215 and Add.1)

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AGENDA ITEM 90: CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/36/442)

1. Mr. KERRIGAN (Secretary-General for the World Assembly on Aging), introducing agenda item 84, drew the Committee's attention to the report of the Secretary-General (A/36/472) containing an interim progress report on the status of preparations for the World Assembly on Aging, prepared in compliance with paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 35/129. The report of the Advisory Committee for the World Assembly on Aging, requested by the same resolution, was annexed to that document.

2. Since taking up his post in June 1981, his main concern had been to promote and accelerate the pace of activities that had already been undertaken by the Secretariat in preparation for the World Assembly. Much attention had been given to the basic question of ensuring that the entire content and substantive coverage of the endeavour reflected the thinking of the General Assembly and other policy-making bodies, in reaching the objective of the World Assembly on Aging.

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(Mr. Kerrigan)

3. Both the absolute and proportional rates of aging had dramatically increased on a world-wide scale during the previous decades, owing to significant modifications in rates of fertility, mortality and life expectancy. There would be a particularly steep increase in the collective aging of the less developed regions of the world, those countries which were least able to afford the growing burden of an aging population, with its legitimate claims for protection and material security. Those changes were brought about by such trends as massive population movements from rural to urban areas and industrialization and changing employment patterns, all of which disrupted the traditional family structures which, almost everywhere, had been the only basis for security and welfare of elderly people. The very countries that were striving to attain a certain level of material development against great odds through industrialization and by other means were at the same time the least prepared to replace the traditional family and community functions which supported and protected the elderly with public means such as social security programmes, institutional arrangements or other substitutes.

4. The World Assembly on Aging might, therefore, have been justified in purely humanitarian terms. However, the various discussions leading up to the launching of the project had wisely enlarged its scope to encompass the developmental aspect of the issue, to consider individual aging and the aging of societies as the natural and foreseeable consequence of all that had been done to eradicate poverty, inequality and individual misery. The aging of society in the developing countries should be seen as a great sign of progress and success. The World Assembly on Aging should be a test of the international community's capacity to cope with that progress.

5. The aging of societies should be seen as a challenge rather than as a problem, just as aging people should be considered not as a burden but as a great resource. Similarly, the World Assembly on Aging should be seen as a contribution to the over-all development effort of the United Nations system and not just as a gesture towards another "special interest group".

6. He assured the representative of Somalia, who had observed that life expectancy in his country was 50 years, that that fact, common to many developing countries, would be considered in the work of the World Assembly.

7. One of the main objectives of the World Assembly on Aging was the development, elaboration and promotion of a long-term world plan of action for the protection and promotion of the aging and as a joint statement of the international community's commitment to those objectives. A series of technical meetings at regional level had already been convened for that purpose, in preparation for regional intergovernmental meetings to discuss and prepare inputs for the World Assembly and for an international plan of action. The first such meeting, involving the ESCAP region, was to be held in the near future, and would be followed by similar meetings in the other regions to be

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(Mr. Kerrigan)

organized in co-operation with the United Nations regional commissions. A panel of individual experts would be convened shortly in Geneva to consider two basic papers commissioned from outside consultants, one on the humanitarian aspects of the problem, and one of the developmental issues involved. By the time the Advisory Committee for the World Assembly on Aging held its second session, in February 1982, a preliminary draft for the international plan of action would be ready, based on the results of the regional meetings and on proposals and contributions from Member States.

8. The response of Member States to the requests made by the Secretary-General for assistance in promoting the objectives of World Assembly were summarized in the Secretary-General's report (A/36/472). Attention should also be drawn to the active and valuable role played by specialized agencies and many national and international non-governmental bodies in the preparatory activities.

9. In conclusion, he expressed his gratitude to the Government of Austria for its generosity in offering to host the World Assembly and assured the Committee that he would make every effort to see that the work of the Assembly reflected the challenge of accommodating the aging population and responded effectively to that challenge.

10. Mr. ERGUN (Assistant Director, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs), introducing agenda items 77, 78 and 80, said that the United Nations activities in the field of youth could be divided into four broad categories: analysis of the needs, aspirations and situation of youth; channels of communication between the United Nations and youth and youth organizations; participation of youth in development activities; and provision of services to youth. The Committee had before it four reports of the Secretary-General prepared under those four headings (A/36/409, A/36/427, A/36/135 and A/C.3/36/1).

11. Reviewing the contents of those documents, he pointed out that it was expected that sports exchanges would serve as a major dimension of the International Youth Year activities at the national, regional and international levels; and that emphasis had been placed on the importance of inter-agency co-ordination and continuous and effective exchange of information in view of the great responsibilities engendered by the International Youth Year and the need for the expansion of co-ordination and information activities at the national, regional and international levels.

12. Turning to agenda item 78, he drew the Committee's attention to the Secretary-General's report on National Experience in Promoting the Co-operative Movement (A/36/115). The report suggested that the establishment of and support to co-operatives were important for promoting economic, social and cultural development among all sectors of society. Among less advantaged population groups, co-operatives could contribute to improved welfare and levels of living based on active participation and equitable sharing of benefits. The report

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(Mr. Ergun)

also contained suggestions on the use of co-operatives by Governments as an instrument of social development by providing needed technical and financial support and administrative guidance for their effective promotion and sustained development. It also outlined various measures by which the international community could assist national co-operative movements, with special reference to their potential for contributing to improved welfare and levels of living among specific population groups such as youth, women, disabled persons and the elderly.

13. On the question of the elderly and the aged, agenda item 80, he pointed out that the programme on aging was carried out within the framework of the economic and social aspects of development and of the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade. It sought to identify critical issues and emerging trends in the field of aging, to create international awareness of the situation and the problems of the aging population, and to promote an environment to support national and international efforts to meet the human needs and aspirations involved.

14. Research had been conducted on the conditions and needs of the aging, as well as on the implications for development of the rapid increase in the aging population, particularly in the developing regions. That process was so significant that it was expected to lead to fundamentally different societies. A wide international exchange of information was therefore necessary to promote awareness of that trend and the accompanying problems faced both by societies and individuals.

15. Mr. MUELLER (Director in Charge, Crime Prevention Branch), introducing agenda item 90, drew the Committee's attention to the report of the Secretary-General (A/36/442) and said that, since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 35/171, the general approach of the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice branch had changed to one of viewing crime in the context of national development, taking into account the social and economic system, cultural values and changing circumstances. In pursuance of resolution 35/171, the Secretary-General had undertaken a study of ten of the countries with the lowest crime rates in order to find out why their crime rate was so low and whether their methods and techniques of crime prevention could be transferred to other countries. Ten countries with exceptionally high crime rates would also be studied to see what it was that they were doing wrong. It was hoped that the programme would help to establish more effective crime prevention policies within the context of development. A similar change of approach could be seen in the United Nations regional institutes for the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders and the inter-regional institute in Rome.

16. In view of the importance of acquiring an adequate data base before any recommendations could be considered, the Secretary-General had convened an interregional ad hoc meeting at the School of Criminal Justice of Rutgers University to prepare the second world crime survey, which, it was hoped, would provide the information necessary to draw up crime prevention strategies.

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(Mr. Mueller)

17. The programme budget had been changed so that the stress lay firmly on crime trends and criminal justice strategies in the context of development. Similarly, the draft medium-term plan for 1984-89 fully took into account the social and economic factors of crime prevention in the context of over-all national planning.

18. In conclusion, he drew attention to the work of the United Nations regional institutes for the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders (A/36/442) and noted that a meeting was scheduled to take place in December 1981 at Addis Ababa with the hope of establishing a similar institute for Africa south of the Sahara, an area particularly hard hit by crime arising out of urbanization and industrialization.

19. Mrs. ROSER (Federal Republic of Germany), speaking on agenda items 76 and 77, said that her country had consistently devoted special attention to the role of youth in society and had long considered it necessary to adopt special policies to help to prepare the younger generation for its task of shaping the world's future. An important instrument of that policy was the Federal Youth Plan, which had had funds totalling more than 200 million marks in 1979 and which financed projects such as international youth work, political education, the activities of youth organizations and the construction of youth welfare facilities. Moreover, the national plan was supplemented by similar plans implemented at the level of the Länder.

20. The main objective of those policies was to give all young people equal opportunities, in terms of their personal, educational and social development, to help them fulfil their potential and thus enable them to contribute to the development of the country as a whole. To that end, a wide choice of options must be made available and the role of the State was to provide material support, protective legislation and social guarantees but not to regiment young people or offer ready-made answers on how to achieve contentment.

21. The International Youth Year was an ideal opportunity to promote international understanding and development among young people. It was important to ensure that the Year did not degenerate into rhetoric but that it benefitted young people everywhere, that it dealt with existing problems and tried to find solutions to them. Her country was a member of the Advisory Committee for the International Youth Year and was committed actively to support the preparations for the Year. On the other hand, if the Year was to be successful and was to have a lasting impact, young people themselves - not only government institutions and bureaucracies - must participate in the formulation of the relevant policies and in the implementation of the programmes, because, in the words of the Brandt report, the shaping of the world's future was much too important to be left to Governments and experts alone.

22. Mrs. Masmoudi (Tunisia) took the chair.

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23. Mr. KOFA (Liberia) said that the proclamation of International Youth Year was a timely reminder that even in the current age of enlightenment and humanitarian concern, young people were still the victims of exploitation and abuses in many parts of the world. His delegation attached great importance to matters of youth, primarily because of the leadership role youth was currently playing in the development of Liberia. It was in recognition of that phenomenon that Liberia had lowered the voting and legal age from 21 to 18 years.

24. In spite of the laudable efforts made by the United Nations system and voluntary organizations to combat poverty, disease and ignorance, the problems of youth had not been properly addressed. For example, in the "have not" countries, young people were confused by continuing and mounting social injustices. He was referring, in particular, to those who lived under the obnoxious policy of apartheid, racial discrimination and foreign domination.

25. Every effort should be made to underscore the underlying causes of the activism of youth since it appeared that it was the lack of opportunity to assume responsible roles that determined the difference between the creative spirit and destructive action of youth. The proper remedy was to give young people the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the life and development of their countries. While the question of training and education was essential, emphasis should be placed on equality without distinction as to sex or whether people lived in rural or urban areas.

26. His delegation noted with satisfaction the pragmatic approach taken in the report of the Secretary-General (A/36/215 and Add.1) and the efforts being made to obtain specific and useful data on young people in developing countries. Liberia would support any measures for the improvement of the general situation of the younger generation.

27. His delegation was pleased to note that the international community was now directing its undivided attention to the matter of aging. Using the yardstick of age and physical condition, that group of useful citizens, who in their lifetime had taken an active role in the development of their respective countries, were now being relegated to the category of subhumans in some societies. While there should be no hindrance to the full participation of the individual in the mainstream of national life, it was necessary to approach the question of age from several different viewpoints, depending on the cultural background, lifestyle and experience of each country. In Africa, and particularly Liberia, everyone was accustomed to thinking of themselves in relation to family, clan and tribe. Because of the extended family system, there was always someone to look after the elderly, and the latter were respected for wisdom and knowledge. Liberia would unreservedly support any decision of the Committee for the benefit and improvement of the social condition of the elderly and the aged.

28. Mrs. AKAMATSU (Japan) said that since the youth of today were tomorrow's

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(Mrs. Akamatsu, Japan)

leaders, their participation in economic, social, cultural and other activities at the international and national levels was of great importance. The proclamation of International Youth Year and the implementation of related activities would be significant in enhancing general recognition of the importance of youth and in promoting the participation of youth in such activities.

29. In connexion with IYY, the Government of Japan had initiated various systematic measures related to youth and had been involved in international youth interchange programmes. Japan also regarded as important the activities of youth-related non-governmental organizations which promoted the importance of self-reliance and rural development. For its part, the Government of Japan would consider further specific measures it would take after it had drawn up its national programme of action.

30. Japan agreed that the condition of youth varied from country to country and that measures that might be called for in developing countries might differ from those required in developed countries. In formulating programmes and activities, it was necessary to make them universally applicable and flexible so that each Member State could take effective action in accordance with the needs of its own youth.

31. With regard to the specific programme of measures and activities to be undertaken prior to and during International Youth Year (A/36/215) the preparation of an appropriate international instrument was suggested as one area of activity. In Japan's experience, never once had such instruments been of the slightest use in advancing the causes for which they were purported to have been drawn up. Since there was already a specific programme of measures and activities, what was now needed was action. However, since the Advisory Committee for IYY had adopted a paragraph recommending the preparation of such an instrument, in a spirit of compromise, Japan would not strongly oppose its adoption.

32. Her delegation, however, was not completely satisfied with the specific programme of measures and activities that had been adopted by the Advisory Committee. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the measures proposed, emphasis should be placed on the evaluation and study of measures pertaining to youth which were currently being implemented and which would continue to be implemented through 1985. The specific programmes should be constantly reviewed and, where necessary, revised.

33. Mr. VELLA (Malta) said that world demographic trends showed that the oldest sector was the fastest growing segment of the world's population and it was in the developing regions that the increase was most rapid. In other words, by the year 2000, the aging would comprise nearly 10 per cent of the world's population. In view of that prospect, the United Nations programme on aging assumed a vital role along with other social and humanitarian activities

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(Mr. Vella, Malta)

of the United Nations. It represented a concerted and determined effort to address the problem of aging populations particularly in view of their potential impact on the economic and social development of the developing countries. The diversity of industrial development in developing countries and the population movements it generated should be respected. Indeed, in some regions the problems might be as acute as those found in developed countries.

34. His delegation was most satisfied to note that increasing attention was being given to the problems of aging and their impact on economic development by the specialized agencies and other organizations. Particular note should be taken of the keynote address given by the Executive Director of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities at the recent European Follow-up Forum on Aging, held at Castelgandolfo, Italy, from 6 to 11 September 1981.

35. The United Nations regular programme on the elderly and the aged should consolidate the experience achieved over the years. That experience should be put at the service of the World Assembly on Aging by furnishing the Assembly with the most updated information. In that connexion, it was to be hoped that UNFPA would continue and, indeed, increase its commitment to activities for the elderly. It had also been a source of encouragement to note that the international organizations having consultative status with the Economic and Social Council had fully co-operated with the United Nations as they had been requested to do in resolution 34/153.

36. With regard to long-term planning, the regular programme should be geared to the requirements of the international plan of action on aging to be adopted by the World Assembly for measures of execution, monitoring, evaluation and implementation. The General Assembly, in resolution 34/153, had clearly indicated how the regular programme and the World Assembly should interact so that the expertise put at the disposal of the Assembly was put to good use after the plan of action had been adopted.

37. His delegation was genuinely impressed with the amount of work done by the Advisory Committee for the World Assembly on Aging in one short week. The recommendations contained in paragraph 45 of its report (A/36/472), however, indicated not only what had been achieved but also what remained to be done. Those recommendations were procedural in nature and the Third Committee should find no difficulty in recommending them for adoption by the General Assembly in an appropriate resolution. His delegation supported all the recommendations and wished to express its gratitude to the Government of Austria for offering to act as host to the World Assembly.

38. Finally, his delegation noted with satisfaction that the Secretary-General had established the Fund for the World Assembly on Aging as contemplated in resolution 35/129 and hoped that more donors would be forthcoming. Those finances should be managed extremely carefully, particularly at the preparatory

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(Mr. Vella, Malta)

stage of the Assembly, without, of course, prejudicing the success of the Assembly. The common objective was not just to hold the Assembly, but to achieve constructive results.

39. Mr. O'Donovan (Ireland) resumed the Chair.

40. Sister RICHARDSON (Observer for the Holy See) said that her delegation considered International Youth Year to be an opportunity for adopting global, practical measures in response to the needs of youth, and she expressed the hope that the Year would stimulate youth education focusing on the fulfilment of the individual's spiritual, cultural, social, physical, economic and political aspirations with a view to achieving development for peace through participation.

41. Society could be greatly enriched by developing young people's capacity to renew it. The potential social contribution of youth would be highly appreciated in those sectors where an aging population had been deprived of the imagination, creativity and optimism of a youth component.

42. Economic development was related to the renewal of education. Pope John Paul II, in the recent encyclical "On Human Labour" noted that unemployment was especially painful when young people failed to find work after appropriate preparation and saw their sincere desire to assume responsibility for the economic and social development of the community sadly frustrated. As the Pope had said, the renewal of education implied a suitable system of instruction aimed, first of all, at developing mature human beings but also at preparing people to assume an appropriate place in the vast, socially differentiated world of work. Moreover, education should impart values that would help the next generation to achieve a more just sharing of the goods of the world.

43. Any valid education had spiritual dimensions: young people must be offered an opportunity to grow in the knowledge of God and to commit themselves to a cause, to an ideal and to life. The spirituality of youth implied such values as authenticity, sincerity and generosity, over and above material well-being. The family and society must be prepared to share genuine spiritual values with young people so that they could be enriched by their heritage.

44. The dignity inherent in every human being, young or old, was the basis for the human rights of the individual, and for the related duties. Accordingly, in any renewal of education, young people must be educated about their rights and duties in relation to the family and society. Those rights included the right freely to organize, the right to protection, inter alia, from prostitution, pornography, drug abuse, unsafe working conditions, political coercion, false imprisonment and kidnapping, the right to recreational facilities and, for the most marginal young people - the refugees, migrants, disabled, imprisoned or orphaned - the right to specific assistance.

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(Sister Richardson)

45. By the same token, young people had a duty to use and to develop their personal talents so as to be able to contribute to family, community or social well-being, to reject alienation and to co-operate with adults in the development of society, and to accept responsibility for the future of the family and the community. Finally, they had a duty to refrain from violence at all levels: personal and inner violence, interpersonal violence and social violence.

46. In her delegation's opinion, the International Youth Year offered a great opportunity for the family to rededicate itself to the task of creating an atmosphere of mutual caring for all family members. The International Youth Year was important to countries because it provided an impetus to review and to plan policies and programmes for youth; it was important to the United Nations, because it would introduce young people to the principles of the Charter and to the ideals of the future international community, namely, global interdependence and advanced levels of international understanding and acceptance. Lastly, the International Youth Year was important to the Church, for which young people represented hope and optimism.

47. Although the United Nations defined young people as being between the ages of 15 and 24, the relevant programmes should be sensitive to the human differences within that age range. Moreover, the Year should help to expose young people to the values of people in different parts of the world; it should be a time of animated dialogue and openness. As Pope John Paul II had said, it was important to open the frontiers of States economic and political systems and the vast realms of culture, civilization and development to the saving power of Christ.

48. Mr. BLEACH (United Kingdom), speaking on agenda items 76 and 77, said that, although young people inevitably lacked the experience that came with age, they had a natural optimism and honesty which could help to bring a fresh approach to the debates of their elders. The young people in the United Kingdom, and perhaps in the world, faced new challenges among them the development of weapons of unprecedented sophistication and destructiveness and persistence of poverty, hunger and unemployment. The younger generation had not created those problems but it was among those they affected most and, all too often, young people were not given any real opportunity to help to solve them.

49. The International Youth Year offered an opportunity for young people to express themselves, and he appealed to the Committee to allow them to play an important role in organizing what was, after all, their Year. They did not want the entrenched attitudes and prejudices of other generations to dominate their Year. He therefore suggested that in so far as possible young people should determine the theme and organization of the Year, on the local, regional and national level, through voluntary and non-governmental organizations. In that way, the young people represented on the relevant bodies would be able to exert a major influence and to ensure that the Year did not become excessively politicized.

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(Mr. Bleach, United Kingdom)

50. His Government welcomed the proposals of the Advisory Committee (A/36/215) relating to vocational guidance and training programmes, which it considered to be a positive way of combating youth unemployment. Such programmes already existed in the United Kingdom and initiatives to mark the Year had already been undertaken. Naturally, the United Kingdom would interpret the detailed recommendations contained in the Advisory Committee's report in the light of its own particular circumstances. For example, it had reservations about the need for new domestic legislation or for new international instruments, and it trusted that proposals involving financial implications would be carefully weighed.

51. In outlining some of his Government's programmes for young people and the role of youth services, he pointed out that voluntary programmes were emphasized in all such activities. His Government attached high priority, for example, to preparing young people for the transition from education to employment, as demonstrated by its education-based youth services. The need to ensure that the education system prepared young people for work had led to wide-ranging consultations on school curricula and to a series of regional meetings under ministerial chairmanship. One of the most successful programmes designed to provide young people with the experience they needed to compete successfully for jobs was the Youth Opportunities Programme, which had been begun in 1978. In July 1981, his Government had announced that it would expand that Programme to provide 550,000 places in 1981-1982, in other words, 280,000 more than those planned for the 1980-1981 period and more than double the number available in 1979-1980. The Government had also announced that it would again expand the Programme to meet the needs for the 1982-1983 period; such expansion meant that every young person leaving school who was without a job for three months could be offered a place in the Programme. The emphasis was on work preparation courses, high-quality work experience programmes and training workshops, although the Programme was flexible enough to meet young people's wide range of employment needs and to enable them, for example, to move from employment to further education.

52. At the same time, the United Kingdom Government was promoting the New Training Initiative, the main objective of which was to ensure that all 16 and 17 year olds had an opportunity either to continue full-time education or to become fully equipped for work through vocational training and work experience. In May 1981, the Government had also published proposals designed to provide more systematic vocational preparation for 16 and 17 year olds, to modernize and make the existing apprenticeship system more flexible and to create wider opportunities for the training and retraining of adults.

53. Unemployment was a serious problem in the United Kingdom, and young people were among those hardest hit. However, all the above-mentioned programmes showed that, far from underestimating the unhappiness and loss of income that unemployment caused to families and communities, the United Kingdom Government was very much aware of those problems and was working hard to enable young people to enjoy the fullest possible opportunities for education, training and productive employment.

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(Mr. Bleach, United Kingdom)

54. Community services, another feature of youth programmes in the United Kingdom, also provided a socially useful focus for the energies of young people. Thousands of young people voluntarily chose to participate in community services designed to help those in need, for example, the elderly and the disabled. The Government provided financial support for many of the relevant organizations, and many schools organized community service activities as part of their curriculum.

55. In line with the emphasis placed on voluntary and community-organized activities, all the organizations and programmes he had mentioned were voluntary. Voluntary organizations ranged from large federations of clubs to young people's sections of churches; there were also a number of co-ordinating bodies, one of which, the British Youth Council, was responsible for co-ordinating the representation of the interests of British young people in international youth affairs. Youth organizations in all countries should be given a major role to play in organizing and participating in the International Youth Year.

56. Referring to the statement made at the beginning of the session by the Director of the Division Human Rights, he suggested that young people had a role to play not only in the promotion and protection of human rights but in every field dealt with by the United Nations. Young people had contributions to make to international peace and prosperity and, having been fortunate enough not to have been scarred by the tragedies of the past, they believed in the future. Young people could make the International Youth Year an occasion for reconciliation and hope and perhaps offer some prospects for changing the world.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.