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on Wednesday, 22 July 1998, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. FULCI (Italy)
(Vice-President)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEME: COORDINATED FOLLOW-UP TO AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VIENNA DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION (continued) (E/1998/60)

Mr. AGAM (Observer for Malaysia) said that there was a need for better coordination of human rights activities within the United Nations system, as recommended in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. However, the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the system could lead to overlaps in the mandates of various entities, thereby causing confusion and seriously hampering the system's human rights efforts. He therefore strongly supported the role of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in coordinating the Organization's human rights activities and in providing technical assistance and commended the High Commissioner's approach of advancing human rights through constructive dialogue.

In both policy-making and programme implementation, the United Nations system should be guided by the principle of the equality and interdependence of all human rights. His delegation was not convinced of the merit of the rights-based approach, which reflected the idea that the enjoyment of civil and political rights would automatically bring about full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development. The implementation of the right to development was still lagging far behind the implementation of other rights, even though the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action had clearly reaffirmed that development was a fundamental human right. He welcomed the views which the High Commissioner for Human Rights had expressed to the Council on the subject, and he hoped that the Council would clearly state that the right to development should be at the forefront of the human rights agenda.

Development could not be achieved without appropriate national policies, international cooperation and effective participation by all members of society. Currently, some countries were denied the right to participate in matters which affected the lives of their citizens. Democracy could not survive unless all countries were fully integrated into the global economic and financial systems.

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The hazards of the increasingly competitive global economy were illustrated by the Asian economic crisis, which had robbed most of the citizens of the countries affected of their right to development and had had world-wide repercussions. The continuation of that situation would jeopardize the economic well-being, and therefore the human rights, of millions of people. He urged the Council to call for the fulfilment of the commitment to effective international cooperation as a means of realizing the right to development.

His Government attached great importance to the human rights of women and children. It was committed to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and of the Council's agreed conclusions 1997/2 on a comprehensive strategy for mainstreaming the gender perspective into all aspects of the Organization's work. Initiatives to strengthen coordination should also target activities for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

Mr. MATEŠIĆ (Observer for Croatia) commended the Secretary-General's efforts to integrate human rights fully into all aspects of the organization's work and to give high priority to the promotion and protection of those rights. He also welcomed the mainstreaming of the gender perspective and the balanced approach taken by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in addressing all categories of rights; her office should be given adequate resources. Further efforts were needed to streamline and rationalize the United Nations human rights apparatus and to coordinate its activities. For example, further simplification of the process of reporting to the treaty bodies might encourage more States to ratify the major human rights instruments. All countries should engage in constructive and open dialogue in order to reach a common understanding of the full meaning of the right to development and of how it was to be realized. The Bretton Woods institutions had an active role to play in implementing the right to development.

Croatia continually strove to harmonize its legislation with international human rights standards. Its Constitution guaranteed a wide range of human rights and affirmed their universality and interdependence. In view of its significant minority population, Croatia had enacted a constitutional law designed to enhance the protection of an extensive set of minority-specific rights, including linguistic and educational rights, the right to form minority associations, access to the media, political representation and cross-border contacts and cooperation. A number of economic, social and cultural rights were

justiciable under Croatia's legal system and were applied in practice by the country's courts and administrative bodies. The major human rights instruments, to which Croatia was a party, had a supra-statutory status in national legislation and were directly applicable in courts of law. The Government sought to implement the Declaration on the Right to Development through its programme for sustainable development, which gave priority to underdeveloped parts of the country. In addition, it had established three national commissions dealing, respectively, with equality, rights of the child and human rights education. The Governmental Commission on Equality had elaborated a national policy based on the Beijing Platform for Action. On the recommendation of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, a needs assessment report had been prepared with the assistance of the former Centre for Human Rights. The report had proposed a number of important technical cooperation projects in the field of training, which the Government fully supported. Croatia would continue its efforts to enhance the enjoyment of human rights at the national and international levels.

Mr. GUBAREVICH (Belarus) welcomed the efforts of UNHCHR to mainstream human rights and promote intra-system cooperation and coordination and the action of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), among others, in supporting the democratic process in countries with economies in transition and helping strengthen their national human rights protection and promotion mechanisms. However, the Organization had not yet used its full capacity in the implementation of the Vienna decisions, and his delegation therefore supported the Secretary-General's recommendation on establishing human rights focal points in all relevant components of the United Nations system and on developing joint or coordinated programmes to solve human rights problems. His Government believed that it was very important for the human rights aspect to be taken into account in developing and implementing coordinated country programmes and that human rights focal points in United Nations field offices would be able to provide effective assistance to national Governments and civil society in putting human rights standards into practice. However, the human rights aspect should not be strengthened at the expense of other programme activities.

His delegation hoped that the study of technical assistance being carried

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out by UNHCHR would lead to an increase in the volume and effectiveness of such assistance, which was extremely important for promoting the democratic transformation process in countries with economies in transition.

In their coordinated activities aimed at implementing the Vienna decisions, all United Nations system entities should continue to adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach in which civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, including the right to development, were of equal significance, interrelated and mutually reinforcing. However, his delegation also supported the Secretary-General's conclusion that there should be a focus on economic, social and cultural rights, on which the least progress had been achieved.

He expressed the hope that the United Nations system and donor countries would actively support, in a coordinated manner, implementation of the decisions of the Conference on Refugees, Returnees, Displaced Persons and Related Migratory Movements in the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States, held in Geneva in 1996, because the Conference had exemplified the kind of comprehensive approach to human rights which the Secretary-General was advocating.

Belarus welcomed the Secretary-General's recommendation that the Council should support the adoption and implementation of national human rights action plan; Belarus was in the process of developing such a plan, in fulfilment of recommendations arising out of recent parliamentary hearings on human rights.

He supported the comment by the Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic at the 37th meeting to the effect that non-governmental organizations, if they were interested in keeping their consultative status, should be constructive in what they said and must abide by the agenda set by the Council.

Mr. MUKHOPADHAYA (India) said that, although his delegation had no difficulty with the rights-based approach or with the idea of mainstreaming human rights in the United Nations system, it had doubts as to whether the integrated approach to human rights agreed upon at the Vienna Conference was fully shared by all members of the international community, dialogue partners and even the United Nations system itself. It seemed that the concept of human rights that was being mainstreamed consisted essentially of civil and political rights and was analytically divorced from democracy and development, so that it set up a false dichotomy between human rights and development. He was concerned that the mainstreaming of human rights, especially in development activities,

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could displace the centrality of development itself in the Organization's work. The Organization's development activities contributed to the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, which should be mainstreamed along with all other human rights under a more comprehensive approach. Likewise, coordination of human rights activities within the United Nations system should explore the complementarity between those activities and development.

India endorsed the rights-based approach, according to which human rights were independent of needs and resources. In its national policies, India had never made human rights contingent upon development. However, the issue of resources must also be addressed. Many human rights problems could be traced to competition for scarce resources. He shared the view of the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) that the unprecedented decline in official development assistance constituted non-fulfilment of obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and that national responsibility must be complemented by international solidarity.

While United Nations country-level development assistance mechanisms could address the issue of access to existing resources under existing conditions, it was also important to address the imbalances and distortions at the international level that affected the right to development. UNHCHR could play a role in that regard through coordination with development agencies vis-à-vis the forces and institutions that influenced development and economic cooperation, with a view to changing the entire mentality of international cooperation for development and human rights. The increased expenditure on human rights activities in various parts of the United Nations system was valuable, to the extent that such activities were carried out at the request of States and helped to build a framework conducive to the promotion of democracy, development and human rights. However, despite the growing recognition of the need to remedy the relative neglect of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development, resources of United Nations development agencies that could have utilized for the promotion of those rights were being directed towards civic institutions. For example, he welcomed the emphasis of UNDP on poverty eradication and the right to development but questioned whether its programmes to reform judicial systems and police forces had a greater impact on poverty than programmes specifically geared to poverty eradication and development.

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He supported the strengthening of the coordination and implementation of human rights activities, which should receive more of the Organization's budgetary resources. He wondered whether the growing imbalance in the attention being paid to individual human rights, to the detriment of economic, social and cultural rights, was due to the fact that the latter made far greater demands on international cooperation. He hoped that the current exercise and the five-year review of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action would help ensure that the consensus on the interdependence of democracy, development and respect for human rights and on the equal importance of all human rights was reflected in practice.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.