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Substantive session of 1999

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 16th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Wednesday, 7 July 1999, at 10 a.m.

<u>President:</u>	Mr. FULCI	(Italy)
later:	Mr. MANGOELA (Vice-President)	(Lesotho)
later:	Mr. FULCI (President)	(Italy)

CONTENTS

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued)

THE ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT AND WORK IN POVERTY ERADICATION: THE EMPOWERMENT AND  
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued)

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

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (agenda item 1)  
(continued)

Requests from non-governmental organizations for hearings (E/1999/95  
and Add.1)

The PRESIDENT said he wished to announce that statements made from the podium were being broadcast live on the Internet and requested speakers to provide, if possible, floppy disks of their statements.

He took it that there was no objection to the Council hearing the statements of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) listed in documents E/1999/95 and Add. 1.

It was so decided.

THE ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT AND WORK IN POVERTY ERADICATION: THE EMPOWERMENT AND ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (agenda item 2) (continued) (E/1999/44, 50, and 53; E/1999/L.21)

Ms. RIVIERE (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that the time had come for studies, reports and recommendations to give way to genuine political will. The globalization process, although beneficial, should not be an objective in itself; market forces needed to be guided by human wisdom.

Endogenous empowerment, which must be the first priority in any poverty-eradication strategy, required that national budgets should increase their share of social spending, especially on rural women and girls. One form of external assistance was debt cancellation or debt swaps. Outright grants were also preferable to loans, which started the vicious circle that perpetuated financial dependence.

Investment in education and training, especially free primary education - for women and girls in particular - yielded high returns. She applauded the achievements of the world's nine most populous countries, which had pledged at the New Delhi Summit convened by UNESCO to increase basic education coverage and the share of GNP spent on education, and many of which had attained or even exceeded the target. Even the total national budget of many developing countries could never provide high-quality formal basic education for all. To "reach the unreached", alternative and flexible low-cost formal and non-formal education must be provided in the form of training programmes, based on local initiative and knowledge, that were geared

to learners' needs, including their mother tongue. Information and communication technologies and the active participation of all sectors could be instrumental.

To that end, UNESCO was focusing on formal and non-formal educational opportunities for the poor. They included guidance and counselling for girls and women, intensive skills training, revitalization of traditional knowledge in freshwater management, preservation and restoration of heritage sites, crafts combining traditional and modern techniques, and capacity-building and social services to encourage sustainable micro-credit schemes and promote learning and literacy.

She warned, however, against basic-needs satisfaction that relied solely on basic education and literacy. Endogenous empowerment was impossible without the cultural, technical and scientific autonomy crucial to effective and enduring poverty eradication, which depended on the capacity of individuals, groups and peoples to master their destiny. Hence the need to develop national scientific and technological potential. She urged the current session to set unambiguous targets - 0.05 or even 0.1 per cent - of annual gross national product (GNP) for investment in national science and technology capacity-building over 6 to 10 years.

In conclusion, she stressed the close link between poverty eradication and peace building. Properly empowered, women could be a mobilizing force for the attainment of the aims of international peace and the common welfare of mankind - in other words, a "culture of peace" - as set forth in the United Nations Charter and the Constitution of UNESCO.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) recalled that the aim of the Programme of Action adopted at the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development was to improve the quality of life and well-being and stabilize the world population by acknowledging the links between population and development policies and the various social programmes designed to guarantee all human rights, including the right to development. At the recent Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly held to mark the fifth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development, that consensus had been renewed and strengthened in another landmark document setting forth key actions by which Governments, civil society and the international community could attain

the 1994 objectives. A number of pragmatic and practical recommendations covered a variety of health, population and poverty-eradication issues with a direct bearing on the subject of the high-level segment. They dealt with population and development policies and programmes, the need for a better grasp of the link between population, poverty and gender equity and for poverty-eradication programmes to target female and female-headed households, promotion of gender equity, equality and empowerment of women, and the inclusion of gender perspectives in all development policies and programmes. Reproductive rights and reproductive health were deemed to be essential elements of all development activities, especially health-sector programmes, not only in themselves, but also to address poverty-induced inequalities and inequities.

Globalization should be examined in the context of poverty eradication. Despite the undoubted advantages of a free market, it had clearly exacerbated the gap between rich and poor countries and between the rich and poor within countries, and had often resulted in the neglect of the social sector, despite the acknowledged fact that social investment underpinned and guaranteed economic growth. Social policy had to be steered towards a humane outcome, with due regard for the needs of the vulnerable and the destitute, most of whom were women and children.

The United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions had taken important initiatives aimed at eradicating poverty and enhancing social and economic development. They included the 1998 ACC Statement of Commitment to Eradicate Poverty, and Freedom from Poverty: A Framework for Action, as well as the work of the Inter-Agency Task Forces on Basic Social Services for All, Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods, and an Enabling Environment for Economic and Social Development, all of which benefited from the pooling of the United Nations system's various components, including its normative capacity and operational experience, and could be incorporated into common country assessments (CCAs) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

The international community's commitments to poverty eradication must be supported by equal commitments to resource provision. Attainment of global conference objectives was already being derailed - particularly in the poorest countries - by failure to meet agreed goals, as a result of declining official

development assistance (ODA) and mounting debt burdens. That shortfall was already undermining reproductive health, increasing infant, child and maternal mortality and morbidity, and depriving couples of fertility control. The worst affected were, of course, the poorest countries and the poorest groups in countries. The challenge for the international donor community was to adhere to its commitments for resource mobilization.

UNFPA was firmly committed to working with all partner countries, the entire United Nations system and civil society in order to attain all the goals set at the global conferences and thus contribute to poverty eradication. Experience and knowledge must, however, be accompanied by concerted efforts. On 12 October 1999, the world population would have reached 6 billion. Was it to be allowed to increase still further? UNFPA was willing to work with the Council members to ensure achievement of the goal of poverty eradication by 2015.

Mrs. BERGH (Observer for Sweden), having endorsed the statement made on behalf of the European Union, said that the role of employment and work was rightly stressed in discussions on poverty eradication, but not so the empowerment and advancement of women as a means to that end.

She drew attention to the huge disparities between men and women in virtually all spheres worldwide. The vast majority of women - especially the poor - were overburdened by the strains of paid and unpaid work. Empowerment of women was a challenge to male supremacy and was designed to combat the perception of women as inferior, and therefore subordinate, to men. It was a prerequisite for effective poverty-eradication and employment policies.

Empowerment meant equal participation in, and representation at, all levels of political and public life together with equal opportunities. One essential ingredient of Sweden's building of a democratic society had been to ensure that women and men participated on equal terms in decision-making. Sweden had as many female as male ministers and women held 43 per cent of the seats in Parliament, in contrast to the global figure of 5 per cent of government posts and 10 per cent of parliamentary seats. In that connection, she congratulated South Africa on its huge increase in women's active participation in politics since the recent elections, which proved that political will was capable of reversing trends and promoting women's empowerment.

Further action was needed to give women equal access to employment, land and credit. Without gainful employment and economic resources, a woman was hard put to escape from a situation of domestic violence. Standards had traditionally been set by men, often the sole breadwinners, a situation that should be addressed through legal and other reforms and the removal of gender barriers in all areas of life.

Her delegation wished to make five basic recommendations: a gender perspective should be systematically applied in the World Bank's World Development Report on Poverty: 2000-2001; social safety nets should be designed to protect women from domestic violence; there should be a stronger focus on men's help in empowering women; close cooperation of the social partners was needed to enhance gender equality; and firm United Nations action should be taken to mainstream gender into all the policies and programmes of the system and to ensure that it was monitored and evaluated at the highest level.

Mr. SAADI (Morocco), having welcomed the Secretary-General's report (E/1999/53) endorsed the views and concerns expressed by the spokesman of the Group of 77, said that Morocco was undergoing a unique period of transition, which would mobilize people to combat poverty with the participation of the victims themselves. His authorities had formulated policies based on the three objectives of accelerating the growth rate in the interest of job generation; speeding up integration, especially in the rural areas; and combating social inequalities. The social sector's share of the national budget had increased substantially between 1998 and 1999. A social development agency had been set up to combat poverty and a law had been enacted to provide access to micro-credit.

A national plan of action had been formulated to integrate women and ensure their active participation in development and in social-sector bodies. It comprised literacy and health services for mothers and children, education, employment promotion, and the enhancement of the status of women under the law and in politics, and a campaign had been launched to increase awareness of those issues. However, government efforts alone did not suffice; concerted international assistance was needed to mobilize external funding. He therefore called for restraint on the international financial markets so as

not to hamper development efforts. The most effective means of combating poverty and achieving development and stability was national and international partnership among Governments, NGOs and the private sector.

Mrs. MARINESCU (Observer for Romania) welcomed the fact that the discussions in the high-level segment were focused on the United Nations system's concern with international support for structures that would provide a decent life for all. She agreed with the Secretary-General that United Nations action should seriously address real-economy issues. By placing development at the centre of its agenda, the United Nations had again shown that prosperity and stability were political realities and not simply fall-out from the trade-liberalization and technological progress of globalization.

Her country's complex transition process posed many difficulties that could cause instability. Experience had shown that economic liberalization did not automatically develop markets, nor was it a direct source of economic growth; the outcome of the transition depended solely on the country's actual economic situation. Bold intervention by the executive had not been successful and technological progress was eroding the authorities' intervention capacity. That being said, the executive and legislature were still responsible for mitigating the damage caused by the markets, developing citizen potential and participation, and fairly distributing the fruits of economic growth.

Her Government had concentrated its efforts on applying the Copenhagen Summit recommendations to fight poverty during the 1996-2005 period and had founded a national anti-poverty commission made up of representatives of the various sectors. Aided by the United Nations, the Commission had developed a project with the aims of preparing a methodology for poverty definition and evaluation at the national, regional and local levels; preparing a national anti-poverty strategy; engaging in institutional capacity-building for the framing and implementation of anti-poverty policies; and promoting public participation in anti-poverty activities.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was implementing a comprehensive programme it had developed on the basis of legislative and administrative measures to increase employment. Decision-making had been decentralized with the establishment of the National Agency for Employment and

Vocational Training. In the wake of enterprise restructuring, special programmes had been established to assist lay-offs, and the World Bank had made US\$ 8.5 million available for the purpose. A 70 per cent subsidy had been granted since 1997 to employers recruiting graduates on a fixed-term contract of at least three years. It was expected that, by 1999, there would be some 60,000 beneficiaries - 90 per cent of them unemployed - of the free annual vocational-training programmes also run by the Ministry.

Equal opportunities and equal treatment for women and men was a particularly important issue. Her Government, in its efforts to increase female employment and participation in wealth-creation, sought to implement the right to equality through the adoption of pertinent laws and regulations and facilitation of action by individuals and the social partners.

The Government's Social Programme for 1998-2000 was designed to enhance the social protection of the most vulnerable members of society and improve access to micro-credit.

The United Nations system must play a new role in establishing a culture of national responsibility and international solidarity to guarantee prosperity for all in a world increasingly integrated through its global economy. The conclusions contained in the Ministerial Communiqué to be adopted would certainly help to energize the processes involved in economic and social development.

Mrs. BLONDIN-ANDREW (Canada) said that the Fourth World Conference on Women had identified "women and the economy" and "women and poverty" as two critical areas that Governments, the international community and civil society must address in their efforts to promote gender equality. The Beijing Platform for Action underlined the need for strategic action to promote women's economic rights and independence and the Council's own agreed conclusions on poverty eradication and on the integration of a gender perspective into all its programmes and policies had built on and further developed those commitments. In that connection, it should not be forgotten that the first step in developing a positive future for women and eradicating poverty was to ensure that girl children received the same nurturing, support and education as boys.

In the context of the preparations for the forthcoming Beijing Plus Five review, a critical examination by the Council of the measures being taken to



enhance women's access to and benefit from paid employment was both appropriate and timely. Women constituted a powerful force for economic progress. In Canada, women's participation in the paid labour force had grown steadily over the past two decades and women were starting small businesses at twice the rate of men. Currently, women owned one-third of all small and medium-sized enterprises and in 1997 those businesses had created more jobs than the 100 largest companies. Canadian women also continued to make significant gains in education. Half of all female 20-year-olds were now graduates.

Nevertheless, in both Canada and the world in general, women did not benefit equally with men from their skills and contributions, nor did they participate fully in those sectors of the economy in which well-paid and highly-skilled jobs were growing. They were over-represented in insecure part-time and self-employed work. Their disproportionate share of under-remunerated and unremunerated work continued to feed a cycle of poverty.

The poverty of women was inextricably linked to their position in the economy. Discrimination in employment opportunities and pay, together with heavy burdens of family responsibility, continued to disempower women economically. In recent years moreover, their situation had been affected by the global economic recession and by restructuring policies which did not take their circumstances fully into account.

Her Government had taken significant steps towards addressing some of the major issues relating to women's access to and benefit from paid employment. Policies and programmes had also been developed to ensure that women benefited from the emerging knowledge-based economy by promoting their entry into science, technology and mathematics-related career paths; by promoting skills development through lifelong learning; and by encouraging workplace policies that recognized family responsibilities. In its international cooperation activities, her Government emphasized that gender equality was not only essential to sound development practise but also and lay at the heart of economic and social progress.

Women's participation in the economy could best be enhanced through a multifaceted approach - involving both policies specifically designed to redress gender inequalities and the systematic and visible incorporation of a gender perspective into all programmes. In so doing, Governments should be

guided by their obligations under such international instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The Council had a leading role to play in ensuring continuing support for gender mainstreaming throughout the United Nations system. The draft Ministerial Communiqué, which her delegation fully supported, contained many important messages in that regard. In the campaign against poverty, it should be borne in mind that even in poverty there was a hierarchy and that the special problems of the most vulnerable groups such as minority women, the elderly, children and the disabled, must receive special consideration.

Mr. Mangoaela (Lesotho), Vice-President took the Chair.

Mrs. NANDI-NDAITWAH (Observer for Namibia), having endorsed the statement made by the observer for Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the theme of the high-level segment had been emphasized at most of the global international conferences and the fourth World Conference on Women had categorically stated that sustainable development would remain elusive for the vast majority of the world's poor unless women participated equally in all spheres of decision-making and policy development. In analysing and combating poverty, increased attention must be paid to gender differences. The eradication of poverty was a goal within reach, its causes and effects were well documented and there was no shortage of initiatives or programmes but the implementation of those programmes was still a daunting task.

On its accession to independence, Namibia had been faced with the task of rectifying the effects of more than a century of colonial rule. Apartheid policies catering for a privileged minority had left the vast majority of Namibians in poverty. Her Government was striving to deal with the ensuing challenges which were compounded by a rapid increase in population. A five-year national development plan, adopted in 1995, included specific measures to combat poverty. A national task force on poverty reduction had been set up consisting of representatives of the Government, the private sector and the NGOs. Education, health, agriculture and housing had been declared priority areas and approximately half the total budget was devoted to those four sectors. Some progress had been made, in the face of many difficulties. The number of schools and primary school enrolment had both increased. The number of boys and girls in primary schools were almost the

same but the proportion of girls decreased at the secondary level. There were no restrictions on the choice of subjects, but female students tended to follow gender-stereotyped and traditional courses which led to employment in low-paid jobs. The mortality rate for children under five had fallen from 83 per 1,000 live births in 1992 to 57 per 1,000 live births in 1997. The minimum State pension, payable to all Namibians at the age of 60, had been increased to N\$ 160 a month for both sexes.

Research on drought resistant crops was at an advanced stage and demonstration centres had been set up aimed at diversifying agricultural production and developing a food-processing industry. As for the water supply, 95 per cent of urban areas and 62 per cent of rural areas currently had access to clean water. In 1998, women constituted 48.4 per cent of all civil servants and 90 of them were in management-level posts, as against only two at independence.

The Namibian Constitution guaranteed gender equality. In December 1997, the Government had proposed a National Gender Policy and, in 1998, a Gender National Plan of Action, both of which had been adopted by Parliament in April 1999. The National Gender Policy outlined the policy framework and established guidelines for its implementation, coordination and monitoring. The National Gender Plan of Action set targets for and actions to be taken over a five-year period.

In Namibia and other States members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), special priority was being given to the economic empowerment of women through programmes to encourage women to participate in microeconomic activities through cooperatives and small and medium-scale enterprises. In July 2000, Namibia was to host the first SADC Women in Business Trade Fair.

Mrs. GOMEZ (Spain) having associated her delegation fully with the statement by the observer for Finland on behalf of the European Union, said that basing itself on the general agreement regarding the interrelationship between employment, education, poverty reduction and gender equality, her Government had intensified its efforts to promote more and better job opportunities as an essential factor in poverty reduction, particularly in respect of the groups most seriously affected. Since the vast majority of persons living in poverty were women, the job creation policies had been tackled from a gender perspective and, in accordance with the aims set out by

the special meeting on employment of the European Council, Spain's 1999 Plan of Action for Employment required that equality of opportunity and the inclusion of women should be incorporated into all the activities set out in the Plan.

Poverty often began with truancy or failure at school, often preceded by a similar lack of education on the part of the parents. Countries must thus give priority to ensuring educational and occupational opportunity, providing assistance where necessary but not allowing palliative action to be a substitute for real integration. In that connection, it would be appropriate to standardize the indicators for monitoring and evaluating State policies. The Council's current session was an opportunity for reflection and for analysing the development of State policies. It was important to stress that poverty in any country should be regarded as a challenge and a commitment for all the rest. At the same time, the special characteristics and cultural identity of States must be respected.

Women and children were undoubtedly the groups most vulnerable to poverty. Legislative measures and programmes must be accompanied by codes of good practice which would encourage behavioural change. At home, at school and in the workplace emphasis must be placed on a democratic approach and the values of freedom, solidarity, tolerance and equal rights. It was continuing effort in those areas of daily life that would make equality of rights between men and women the norm.

Wage discrimination, obstacles to obtaining and keeping a job and reconciling work and family life must continue to have priority attention. Stress must also be laid on eradicating domestic violence. The specific situation of women deprived of freedom also needed attention, not only those in prison but also those women who were the subject of trafficking and were held without freedom in many parts of the world. Women and children who left their own country in search of a better life were sometimes left without any protection. States should therefore intensify the coordination between their administrations and the NGOs. Joint operations and networks should be set up, with a view to preventing exploitative networks from thriving at the expense of poverty and ignorance.

She wished to pay a special tribute to all those men and women everywhere who were working to bring about a juster world, who advocated greater global solidarity and were tackling the problems of poverty, in the name of the dignity and quality of life of all human persons.

Mr. RIMKUNAS (Observer for Lithuania) said that poverty reduction was one of the main steps towards sustainable development. Poverty produced ignorance and illiteracy, a lack of jobs and opportunity, degraded the quality of life and could lead to intolerance and social unrest. The economic crises of recent years had served to underline the challenge that faced national and international policy makers in addressing the problems of poverty. Poverty reduction called for productive employment, but any successful strategy must address both socio-economic and gender-specific policy issues, starting with the recognition that gender inequality was a real barrier. Special attention must be given, therefore, to securing the access of women to education and training, equal employment opportunities, the reconciliation of family and working life, and equal access to and control over economic resources and opportunities.

Various aspects of the topic before the Council had been subjected to in-depth analysis at the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. With a view to identifying the progress that had been made in the aftermath of those conferences, the constraints encountered and the lessons learned, and to formulating a national strategy for poverty eradication, the President of his country had established a National Committee on the Copenhagen Declaration, headed by the Minister of Social Security and Labour. Government experts, together with representatives of NGOs and of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), were preparing strategies and policies aimed at alleviating poverty. The discussion in the Council demonstrated the importance of including a gender-mainstreaming approach in those strategies. According to the Lithuanian experts, the programme to eradicate poverty needed to be an active one. Jobs must be created in the labour market; much attention needed to be paid to and funds provided for the education and training of both young people and adults; tax policy should stimulate investment and business development, with special attention to rural development; and an efficient health-care system needed to be developed.

The establishment of a Governmental Commission on Women's Issues had been a significant advance towards gender mainstreaming. The Commission, which was composed of high-level officials, was required to ensure that the principle of gender equality was implemented in all governmental policies and strategies. On 1 December 1998, the Parliament of Lithuania had passed an Act on equal opportunity. The Act included the appointment of a special ombudsman for gender equality. In addition, a special Division for Equal Opportunity in the Labour Market had been established within the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. Its main task would be to enforce the principle of non-discrimination.

Mr. GOONETILLEKE (Sri Lanka) said that the theme of the session was of crucial importance to all States, since poverty was not confined to any one part of an increasingly globalized world. The greatest burden, however, was imposed on the developing countries in general and the least-developed ones in particular. The Secretary-General's report on the subject (E/1999/53) was comprehensive and thought-provoking and, as a result of the lively debate, there was a better understanding of the problem. However, that was no solace to the world's poor. The alarming fact was that the number of persons in absolute poverty continued to grow while the Council was still engaged in analysing the problem and debating solutions.

One of the commitments made at the Copenhagen Social Summit had been to halve the number of people below the poverty line by the year 2015. The challenge and the target were clear. Consequently, no new analyses, commitments, resolutions or decisions were necessary. What remained to be done was to take meaningful steps to realize the commitments that had been made, in the difficult economic environment brought about by globalization and the crisis-ridden international financial and economic scene.

Globalization was, alas, a fact of life. Countries at varying stages of economic development were forced to interact with each other and, while some would succeed, others would not, at least in the initial stage. The quality of a country's workforce had become a critical factor in taking advantage of opportunities and minimizing the social costs entailed by technological transformation and the transition to an open economy.

Given the importance of the creation of employment to the alleviation of poverty, Governments needed to recognize the rising demand for skilled labour

that resulted from globalization, technological development and changes in the organization of work. They must also recognize the crucial role of education and training for new entrants to the job market, as well as retraining for those who were made redundant by the effects of globalization and the financial crisis. According to an ILO study, over one billion workers, out of a total global workforce of three billion, were either unemployed or underemployed at the end of 1998. The situation was likely to worsen when the Multi-Fibre Agreement came to an end in the year 2004. The increased competition would force tens of thousands of workers, mainly women, to join the unemployed. Sri Lanka would be one of the countries most affected.

It had been estimated by UNDP that, to reduce poverty significantly over the next two decades, developing countries needed to grow at a rate of about 6 per cent a year. The question was how the developing countries were to achieve such an ambitious rate of growth in the current economic environment.

His delegation acknowledged the fact that Governments bore the primary responsibility for addressing the problem of poverty in their own countries. They must make political commitments, take the steps necessary to raise the level of investment, provide transparent and accountable governance under which their economies could grow, and implement strategies to eradicate poverty by providing education, training and retraining, in an equitable manner, with a view to empowering the poor, particularly poor women.

However, the developing countries could clearly not attain those goals on their own. His delegation was heartened, therefore, by the statements of the Secretary-General, the Director-General of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the President of the World Bank, recognizing the role of the national and international support system in the fight against poverty. Recognition of the role that must be played bilaterally and multilaterally was most encouraging. In that context, many developing countries had referred to the imperative need to increase ODA and foreign direct investment (FDI), transfer of technology and so on.

Sri Lanka had begun the task of poverty reduction some years previously. It had liberalized its economy as far back as 1977 and had maintained a reasonable and sustainable rate of growth of about 5 per cent with a focus on social development. The people-centred development policies of successive Governments had resulted in significant achievements in human development as

against mere economic growth, with equitable opportunities being provided for both women and men. The high quality of life indices achieved despite the country's relatively modest gross domestic product (GDP) had earned Sri Lanka high human development index ratings. However, as in the case of many developing countries, the burden of poverty threatened to reverse those gains.

A poverty-eradication programme had been instituted to deal with the problem. The Samurdhi Programme, as it was known, was a productivity-oriented programme designed to improve the economic and social conditions of the family unit by enlisting the active participation of the public in development activities. It covered one third of the entire population, consisting of some 1.2 million families at the bottom of the income scale and sought to raise their income level through a series of income-generating activities. Its objective was to provide self-reliance by nurturing the capacities and capabilities of the people through training and investment in productive ventures.

The time had come to transform words into deeds. Action was required on all fronts and achievements should be evaluated on a regular basis so that corrections could be made as countries continued on the path towards eradicating poverty, providing employment and empowering women. He hoped that the developed countries as well as the international financial institutions would help in achieving the goals that had been set.

Ms. FISCHER (Observer for Costa Rica) said that, for several decades her Government had been taking important steps towards the recognition of the rights and needs of women and had committed itself to a number of programmes and policies designed to eradicate various kinds of discrimination. Despite its efforts, however, exclusion and invisibility remained the lot of many women. The economic crisis of the 1980s had imposed high social costs on Latin America. Poverty had returned in force and the expression "the feminization of poverty" had become a cruel reality. High rates of unemployment and a growing number of female-headed families evidenced the decline.

Despite all efforts, the labour market was still divided on sex lines owing to unequal conditions of wages and employment, limited opportunities for education and training and restricted access by women to resources.



In the 1990s, about 30 per cent of the female heads of households had been employed in the formal sector, many of them without full social safeguards. The rest were engaged in the informal sector, in still more difficult circumstances. Poverty tended to be most concentrated among young women with a lack of education that prevented them from obtaining formal employment. Older women were another highly vulnerable group. Since 1970, the female economically active population had been growing much more rapidly than the male one. As in the rest of the world, however, the average income of Costa Rican women was lower than that of men not only through discrimination regarding access to employment but also because of lower wages. It was noteworthy that, although women still earned less than men, 25 per cent of women in employment had advanced professional qualifications, as opposed to 14 per cent of men.

Against the background of the Fourth World Conference on Women and its Platform of Action, Costa Rica had pressed forward with laws, institutions and programmes designed to promote the advancement of women and bring about their recognition as agents and managers of their own development. In particular, the content of policies had been changed with a view to progressing from assistance to action on behalf of gender equity and full development. All the advances that had been brought about so far were founded on legislation. Since the Beijing Conference, 17 Acts and a number of decrees had been promulgated to protect women's rights. Currently, administrative, programmatic and budgetary steps were being taken to see that those laws were being applied and attaining their objectives. Domestic violence had been given special attention.

As for institutions, the National Centre for Women and the Family had been strengthened by its conversion into a National Women's Institute. The Institute possessed the relevant administrative powers and more resources had been assigned to it. Its Director held ministerial rank. The Minister for the Status of Women was a member of the Cabinet, thus ensuring that the gender perspective was taken into account in all Cabinet decisions.

Outstanding among efforts to confront the challenge of poverty and open up opportunities for women was the so-called Solidarity Triangle. It was a

mechanism whereby communities, local governments and public institutions participated jointly in solving problems at the local level. It had proved a resounding success in one fourth the national territory.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Observer for Guatemala) said that the mitigation or eradication of poverty - and the generation of productive employment - had been high on the agenda of the international community for many years. There was increasing awareness of the magnitude and characteristics of poverty, thanks in part to the efforts of the United Nations. That awareness was both encouraging and a cause for concern. It was encouraging that impressive strides could be made in a relatively short period of time to improve certain aspects of human well-being - inoculation, provision of drinking water, the elimination of illiteracy, even respect for human rights - which had led to improvements globally and in his own country. On the other hand, in countries like Guatemala, where two thirds or more of the population lived in poverty, it was inadequate simply to exercise willpower or transfer resources. The causes of poverty were more complex and little progress had been made in combating it.

There were various categories of poverty, all of which occurred in his country. They included the occasional poor - those who had lost gainful employment, perhaps temporarily; those afflicted by chronic poverty that was passed on from generation to generation; those who were excluded and vulnerable on account of their ethnic background or gender; and, lastly, young people who, for want of opportunities, neither studied nor worked and constituted an ever-growing proportion of the poor. Each type of poverty reacted differently to different policies, some of which pursued contradictory objectives.

The obvious reaction was to generate productive employment opportunities, through a far more dynamic economic expansion than in recent years. That, however, raised the question of the overall requirements to be fulfilled in order to achieve higher growth, such as the content and scope of macroeconomic management, commercial policy, institutional development and the question of what should be the proper climate for investment. Internationally, the relevant issue was access to markets, expertise and resources: the international community was thus confronted with an extremely broad agenda.

Not even dynamic growth ensured the creation of additional jobs; indeed, Latin America's experience over the past decade was that liberalization, with its greater efficiency and productivity, displaced labour towards less productive activities or marginalized it altogether. Nor was growth a sufficient condition to ensure a diminution of poverty. Other public policies were required, including social expenditure, job training, decentralization of the decision-making process, more equitable access to the use of land, support for microenterprises and measures to protect the most vulnerable sectors of the population. In other words, the need was not so much for a strategy to alleviate poverty as one to secure sustained and sustainable development.

In Guatemala, the problem of poverty had been approached in the wider context he had mentioned. The frame of reference for his Government's policies was outlined in the 1996 Agreement on a firm and lasting peace that he brought an end to the internal armed conflict. It contained commitments to dynamic growth, greater equity, full respect for cultural and ethnic identity, gender equality and the consolidation of democracy. Social expenditure had increased significantly and some social indicators already revealed palpable results. Poverty, however, was slow to give ground. It was important therefore to continue sharing experiences within the United Nations; development was a long-range venture requiring persistence and political engagement.

Mr. Fulci (Italy), resumed the Chair.

Mr. CHANG Man-Soon (Republic of Korea) said that the international community, distracted by other concerns, had not worked hard enough on poverty eradication. The target of halving the number of people living in absolute poverty by 2015 was therefore a most worthy goal. His delegation concurred that poverty could best be eradicated by providing access to productive employment but the wages for such employment had to yield incomes above the poverty line. In that context, the issue of underemployment was also extremely important in any consideration of the sustainability of an employment regime.

It was appropriate that the Council should be dealing with gender empowerment at the end of a century in which the importance of gender had been recognized. Over the past decade, the number of women living in poverty had increased disproportionately to the number of men in that condition,

especially in the developing countries. Any strategy to combat poverty should thus take account of gender issues. Women were half the human resources available to a country. To ignore their needs or potential was profoundly myopic and incomplete. Although the number of working women had increased worldwide, they were routinely exposed to discrimination, whether in employment, wages, compensation or career advancement. They frequently worked in the informal sector or in small workplaces not properly protected by labour laws. That reflected the importance of having employment policies that could be both female-specific and fair and unbiased, thus ensuring both equal treatment in employment and a family-friendly working environment that recognized women's unique burden.

Women had been among the hardest hit by the economic crisis that had swept through Asia and other parts of the world in 1997. His country had faced massive unemployment and women, particularly the unskilled or elderly, had often been the first laid off. His Government was making efforts to redress that situation. In 1998, laws had been enacted to enhance existing norms pertaining to the prevention of sexual discrimination in economic activities; they included the Act on Equal Employment, the Act on Elimination of Discrimination between Men and Women and Its Remedies and the Women Entrepreneurs Promotion Act.

While the primary responsibility for poverty eradication and gender equality lay with Governments, international cooperation was indispensable. He therefore commended the United Nations, ILO and the international financial institutions on their work in that connection.

Mr. ISCHINGER (Germany), having endorsed the statement made on behalf of the European Union, said that the situation of the poor in developing countries and that in industrialized countries was not directly comparable. In the latter, poverty meant not starvation but material deprivation and possible exclusion from participation in social life. Welfare benefits should thus, besides guaranteeing survival, aim at meeting the basic social and cultural needs of the most disadvantaged sectors of society.

There were few "developed nations", when it came to gender equality. Women often outnumbered men among the poor and the most seriously affected were single mothers and single elderly women. One in four single mothers was on welfare. His Government was committed to providing targeted assistance for

such persons by intensifying active employment promotion and improving child-care options. Women also received insufficient pensions more frequently than men, owing to poorer education, lower pay and the interruption of gainful employment to raise children. The Government had therefore made it a priority to secure appropriate, independent old-age pensions for all women.

Women still faced greater career obstacles than men. If they lost their jobs, they found it harder to be re-employed. Women in the new Länder were disproportionately hard hit: nearly one in four was unemployed. Female participation in the labour force continued to stagnate: only half the women between 19 and 64 were gainfully employed and over a third of all employed women worked part time. They predominated in low-paid and low-skilled jobs, mostly in traditionally female occupations. They rarely broke through to top management positions. As a result, their average income lagged behind that of men. Moreover, owing to family obligations, women often chose part-time work, at a level below their qualifications, which resulted in lack of continuity and negative consequences for their careers and social security.

On the other hand, women in Germany had been quite successful in catching up with men in the field of education. Girls left school with higher qualifications than boys did. The percentage of working women with vocational training had more than doubled - to nearly 80 per cent - over the past 30 years. For the first time, more women than men had entered the universities in 1995.

The promotion and equal participation of women in professional and social life had been made a priority. Legally binding objectives for women's promotion in the civil service had been established in 1994 and it was intended that public contract tendering would be linked to measures for promoting women. Regulations on leave of absence, part-time employment, maternity protection, child benefit and parental leave had been upgraded repeatedly. Since 1996, all children over the age of three had been legally entitled to a kindergarten place. The recently launched "Women at Work" programme aimed at more flexible working hours, better conditions for part-time work, more child-care facilities and greater participation by men in family work. In addition, emphasis would be placed on attracting girls to scientific and technological disciplines. Legal action alone, however, was insufficient to counter discrimination against women in all spheres of life.

The business community, too, should initiate change. Above all, a new way of thinking, in which the stereotyping of women and men would disappear, was required.

Mr. POWLES (New Zealand) reiterated his delegation's support for the full participation of women in development, as equal partners with men. For poverty-reduction strategies to be sustainable, they must be based on the advancement of women and focused on the de facto and de jure protection of women's rights.

New Zealand had implemented a comprehensive "gender and development programme" as part of its ODA which focused on policy dialogue and institutional capacity-building for addressing gender equality. One such project involved support for small business training and provision of micro-credit for rural women in Fiji.

Women's economic self-determination had been shown not only to result in income generation but also to lead to a more equitable distribution of social power. If the issues of employment generation, poverty eradication and the empowerment of women were to be adequately addressed at the global level, it was vital that ODA should take into account all the factors constraining development. Due regard must be given to the economic, environmental and climatic vulnerability of developing countries, particularly small island States, when assessing eligibility for least-developed country status.

The linkages between employment, poverty eradication and gender were apparent, in the developed world, also. In New Zealand, national strategies were currently being designed with a view to reducing the important wage differential between the sexes. Other measures included a business management training and information service for Maori and Pacific people, with a particular focus on women.

New Zealand was committed to participating in international efforts to eradicate poverty, and to maintaining gender equality as a cornerstone of national development policies. Member States, specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs must work with vigour, commitment and imagination to eradicate global poverty, one of the most pressing challenges before the international community.

Mr. POWELL (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the empowerment of women was one of the keys to poverty eradication. WFP was committed to

helping women become agents of change, because assets in the hands of women alleviated poverty. Total economic output could be increased considerably by eliminating gender discrimination in economic life. Women were still subject to household restrictions in many parts of the world. Even when they moved into the market place, they were often confined to low-wage, low-skilled jobs. WFP therefore invested in women, as an effective way of catalysing the development process in both stable and recovery situations.

It was impossible to eradicate poverty without first eradicating hunger; and women were caught most tightly in the hunger trap. Ensuring household food security dominated their lives. They lacked the time, the energy and the resources to benefit from mainstream development opportunities. Through its food-for-work projects, WFP helped communities - and especially women - improve their lives, by providing fish ponds to offer income opportunities, community wood lots to reduce women's workloads and save natural resources, and roads that led both to markets and to clinics, where women and children could eat food high in essential micronutrients and learn about health and nutrition.

Investing in women had made a demonstrable difference. For example, women in Bangladesh who had spent two years in the WFP food-for-training programme currently earned more than before, the food consumption of their households was higher, they had increased their assets and improved their housing, they had become involved in sustainable income-generating activities and they had improved their social status, autonomy, mobility and control over resources.

Since women were responsible for household food security, WFP distributed food wherever possible through the senior female member of the household. Involving women in all phases of food management yielded long-term improvements in their status. In the Sudan, for example, women were in the majority on the food management committees. Moreover, through food aid, women were enabled to graduate into mainstream development programmes.

The result of investing in women was that women earned more and were more confident about their earning power; they and their households ate more and better food; families attached more importance to girls' education; women working in agriculture became less vulnerable to the seasons; they

challenged their gender-based oppression; they became entrepreneurs and gained access to the development ladder. In short, poverty and hunger were reduced.

The PRESIDENT, noting that the WFP Director-General had not attended the meeting, said that international officials, however senior, were the servants of the Member States and must respect the Council if its revitalization was to be achieved.

Mr. WURIE (Sierra Leone), having endorsed the statement made by the observer for Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said it was widely accepted that poverty eradication was the greatest challenge facing each and every Government, international organization and civil and business community. For efforts to succeed, however, the poor must be empowered and their full participation in the fight against poverty secured. The world knew exactly what must be done to eradicate poverty; the political will alone was lacking.

Despite its possession of plentiful natural resources, his country had been unable to create an enabling environment for its citizens. It was characterized by an extremely high incidence of poverty, physical underdevelopment and marginalization, aggravated by nine years of internal conflict. For sustainable development to be achieved, when 70 per cent of the population in Africa lived below the poverty line, the prime focus must be on basic needs such as primary health care, nutrition, basic education, shelter and access to economic and social opportunities. Poverty was a permanent threat to basic human rights in Africa and the burden of debt impeded enjoyment, inter alia, of the right to a life in dignity and freedom. The negative impact of globalization was a further impeding factor.

Most significantly, the recent proliferation of weapons in Africa had a particular impact on women and children, was responsible for 70 per cent of refugees and was a major cause of unemployment and poverty. Without peace, there could be no development, and without development, poverty could not be eradicated. Such was Africa's dilemma, with more guns circulating around the continent than food. Most African countries did not manufacture arms and the international community should accord the same treatment to arms dealers as it did to drug dealers, since both groups were bent on destroying lives and property and creating poverty. To that end, an agency comparable to the Drugs Control Unit should be established within the United Nations.



Although good governance was, indeed, a key to development, insistence on it could impede progress. During the cold-war era, support without conditions had been granted to Governments in Africa that were far worse than the current ones. Since most Africans were illiterate, they could hardly be expected to vote on issues at the current stage. A baby could not run before it had learned how to crawl. In view of the urgent need to address the extremely high incidence of poverty in Africa, the international community must unite to devise a poverty-eradication strategy aimed at sustainable human development.

Mr. STANCZYK (Poland) expressed his delegation's concern at the global poverty situation described in the Secretary-General's report (E/1999/53). In an interdependent, liberalized and globalized world, poverty knew no geographical nor political boundaries, and its elimination was a universal concern requiring a common effort. The poorest countries must be given the highest priority; African countries continued to top that list. While it was clear that economic growth created employment and that employment contributed to poverty reduction, there was no universal blueprint for success. Although women had transformed the labour markets of the world, they formed the majority of workers in the unpaid or precarious sector. The international community, particularly the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, must act to change that unfavourable picture.

Poland had largely completed a political and economic transition which was unprecedented in its history. His Government was currently striving to alleviate the hardship that was an inevitable by-product of transition to a market economy, inter alia by creating an enabling economic and social environment and improving labour market access for vulnerable groups, especially women. Although the equal status of women in public, economic and private life was enshrined in law, de facto discrimination persisted, particularly in employment. The successful and prosperous businesswoman was a new role model for women, causing a questioning of traditional roles and values. Market-oriented mechanisms offered new career opportunities for women which were not, however, without detriment to family life.

One of the most positive developments in recent years was the growing awareness of the global dimension of the item under discussion. Continued efforts at the international level were important, but legislative, political

and practical action at the national level were also vital if mentalities were to be changed and the advancement of women achieved. It was not so much a question of elaborating new ideas, but of effectively implementing the follow-up to the major world conferences.

Mr. MANGOAELE (Lesotho) said that his delegation wished to associate itself both with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and with the impassioned plea of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the acknowledgement of the rights of children as human rights. He fully endorsed the effort made by the Council to spearhead the promotion of gender mainstreaming with a view to achieving equality. There was a particular need for gender mainstreaming in macroeconomic policies, as well as a more holistic approach to poverty eradication and the empowerment of women, which included the lifting of trade restrictions, particularly in areas of interest to the least-developed countries.

Although the primary responsibility for poverty eradication lay with Governments, the success of national efforts required international cooperation. Given that women and men in the same socio-economic environment were impoverished by different processes and affected differently by the availability of opportunities and the existence of constraints in the labour market, successful macroeconomic policies depended on human-resources strategies which capitalized on gender diversity and ensured equal treatment of men and women. The importance of equipping men and women in developing countries with the requisite skills for development could not be overemphasized.

Lesotho had made significant strides in implementing the follow-up to the major world conferences. Thanks to an annual increase in budgetary allocations for education, 70.5 per cent adult literacy had been attained. His Government was convinced that gender equality could enhance economic growth and that development depended on the full emancipation of women. NGOs were currently working at the grass-roots level to raise women's awareness of their legal rights. Efforts were also being made to review all discriminatory laws, including land-use rights, and to ensure that gender concerns were properly incorporated into development plans. At the institutional level, a new Ministry of Environment, Gender and Youth Affairs had been established. The Government had also taken action to ensure that social sectoral plans were

gender-sensitive, with a focus on improving local infrastructure, such as roads, to benefit the rural poor, especially women, children and older persons. Studies were also being conducted to locate and identify the poorest of the poor and to determine how best to assist them. Thanks to assistance from partners in development, a scholarship scheme had been established to assist the children of the poor.

There was no doubt that conflict in Africa was exacerbated, if not caused, by the high incidence of poverty. Moreover, poverty affected the democratic governance process, with opposition party leaders contesting the results of democratic elections by violent means, primarily to secure their own livelihoods. On the eve of the new millennium, it was imperative that, in addressing poverty, the international community must strengthen its political commitment to meeting its obligations regarding resources. At the national level, Governments must continue to strive to create an enabling environment for economic growth and quality employment opportunities essential for the advancement and empowerment of women.

Mr. FONSECA (Brazil) said that, while globalization brought the promise of unprecedented prosperity, its consequences had been such that a new sense of community was required. The major challenge facing the international community was, perhaps, to recapture the human dimension of development and to fill the ethical vacuum resulting from the worship of the market. Policies and society required a complete transformation in order to meet the needs of integrating the 2 billion or so people - most of whom were women - compelled to live in extreme poverty. It would not be an easy task; but the existing inequalities must not be allowed to increase at either the national or the international level.

Various speakers had put forward important ideas about strategies to combat poverty: establish social security networks, improve the situation of women, fight hunger and malnutrition and create productive employment; but they could not be implemented without the political will to do so. That could only be created through democracy. Poverty elimination required effective democratic participation to ensure access to resources, opportunities and public services for men and women alike. That required a free and strong civil society. It was encouraging that the international community and

national groups were campaigning more and more vigorously against social exclusion and for a fairer division of the fruits of economic progress.

His Government had made considerable efforts to maintain a balance between economic and social reform in the country. Social expenditure was already above the 20 per cent mark agreed at the Copenhagen Summit. Between 1993 and 1996, the proportion of the population living below the poverty line had fallen from 45.3 per cent to 35.8 per cent and the proportion below the absolute poverty line had dropped from 20.2 per cent to 13.9 per cent. Macroeconomic stabilization policies had been consistently directed at generating income, eliminating poverty, reforming agriculture, creating employment, investing in social and infrastructure works and modernizing institutions.

The recent trend towards increased poverty among women worldwide was an alarming one. Improving their situation was no longer just an option but an urgent social, economic and ethical necessity. His Government was firmly committed to implementing the principles and programmes stemming from the United Nations global conferences of the 1990s. In recognition of the key role of women in the development process, 16 new laws had been adopted to implement the commitments that had been made. There were also 56 draft laws before the National Congress relating to women's work and welfare, 14 of which related to domestic work. The inclusion of women in the labour market was a priority. In 1997, for example, 52 per cent of the adult female population had participated in the National Programme for Occupational Training.

A favourable international economic environment was a prerequisite for development funding, poverty elimination, job creation and improvement of the situation of women. Effective measures should therefore be adopted to ensure international financial stability, eliminate protectionist practices - especially as they affected developing countries above all in the case of agriculture - and to promote greater coherence in the areas of trade and finance. Development should be at the heart of any international financial restructuring.

Mr. MABILANGAN (Observer for the Philippines) said he welcomed the choice of theme for the high-level segment. Given that poverty was disproportionately female, there must be a mainstreaming of a gender perspective in policies for poverty eradication and employment creation.

It was generally agreed that Governments must be encouraged to adopt and implement legislative and other measures to eliminate violence against women and to provide protection and compensation to victims. The international community must also, however, facilitate the free movement of people and promote the rights of migrant workers. Social justice demanded no less. The least the Member States could do was to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

The international community had a key role to play in supporting efforts to eradicate poverty, promote productive employment and achieve gender equality. If developing countries, particularly the least-developed, were to benefit from globalization, improved market access of their exports was vital. Decisive action must also be taken with respect to debt relief. The particular difficulties of countries affected by recent financial crises must be recognized and their economic recovery supported through global solidarity.

The rate of growth of employment must be sufficient to absorb new labour while taking care of existing unemployment and underemployment. In developing countries, the attainment of such a goal was hampered by numerous constraints. For such countries to achieve an adequate level of growth in employment, they must be assisted, inter alia by a substantial increase in real world demand. While the prime responsibility for formulating and implementing a suitable policy framework rested with the Member States, an enabling environment was crucial, particularly with respect to fiscal and trade matters.

Ms. BLOEM (NGO Committee on the Status of Women), speaking on behalf of the Substantive Committee of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with the United Nations (CONGO), recalled that CONGO's purpose was to further the relationship between NGOs and the United Nations and to examine substantive issues, such as poverty eradication. The active involvement of women in poverty eradication and the bringing together of key players under Council auspices constituted an important development in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, and a vital step forward on the road from commitment to gender equality to its implementation. Four years after the Conference, however, there was as yet no significant alleviation of the poverty burden on women. Women constituted the majority in precarious and unpaid work, which was often vital for family and society survival, but not

recognized in any GNP statistics. To take but one example, unpaid work in Switzerland in 1997 would have accounted for 58 per cent of GDP, if it had been performed by remunerated workers.

In addition to deeply rooted societal biases against women, which were often built into financial and labour institutions, women were also having to cope with the effects of globalization and economic restructuring. Together with their children, they bore the brunt of the social costs of structural adjustment programmes. When, for family survival reasons, children were forced to engage in prostitution, pornography and hazardous work, their very development was threatened. CONGO could not but welcome the new labour standards recently adopted by the international community and joined with the ILO Director General in calling for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour to be made a rallying cause and an ethical issue for all.

The political will must be found to create an enabling environment for lifelong education and training, to provide enhanced employment prospects for women and men alike and to make gender equality a reality in the workplace. Above all, there was a need for good governance and democratic institutions to guarantee the enjoyment by all of the full gamut of human rights.

A recent panel on "New Dynamics for the Eradication of Poverty", held in New York with CONGO support, had called for the cultivation of partnerships at all levels to address poverty and had underscored the importance of seeking out and empowering the poorest to design the solutions which could assist them. The panel had also highlighted the need for social safety nets to be elaborated with the involvement of those they were designed to assist. Educational strategies to eradicate poverty must include education in economics, so that people might acquire the skills to enable them to break the poverty cycle and participate fully in economic life.

Furthermore, given that the fastest growing population segment in the world was the elderly, Governments must act promptly to plan for that social group, members of which might well outlive their saved resources. A focal point for older persons was needed at the United Nations.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.