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Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Tuesday, 19 January 1999, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Somavía (Chile)

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SPECIAL MEETING TO BID FAREWELL TO AMBASSADOR JUAN SOMAVÍA, PRESIDENT OF THE  
COUNCIL

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

The PRESIDENT, who was resigning his office on the Economic and Social Council to assume the post of Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on 4 March 1999, gave a farewell address in which he summarized his activities as Ambassador of Chile to the United Nations. The Council, of which he had twice been President and three times Vice-President, had held a very special place in his career. He thanked all his friends and colleagues who had made his work in the United Nations and on the Council such a pleasurable and rewarding experience; above all, he thanked the Latin American and Caribbean countries for entrusting to Chile, and to himself, the responsibility of representing the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States on many occasions. He particularly wished to thank the countries of the region for their support when he had assumed his responsibilities on the Council and during the World Summit for Social Development, and for supporting Chile's membership in the Security Council, where he had twice served as President.

He had had the honour of working with three Secretaries-General:

Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, who had been a personal friend;

Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, with whom he had worked closely, particularly during the preparations for the World Summit for Social Development; and

Mr. Kofi Annan, who would become his new chief within the United Nations system and for whose personality and vision he had the greatest respect. He had also worked with many Presidents of the Economic and Social Council who had helped to raise that institution to its current status. He wished to commend in particular his successor, Ambassador Fulci of Italy, for his outstanding work as Vice-President of the Council during 1998 and for his acute understanding of the way the United Nations system worked.

It was difficult for him to express in words the enormous substantive and operational support which he had received from the Secretariat on social and economic issues. He drew attention in particular to the work of

Mr. Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs;

Mr. Patrizio Civili, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and

Inter-Agency Affairs; Ms. Margaret Kelley, Secretary of the Economic and Social

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Council; and Mr. Sarbuland Khan, Officer-in-Charge of the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination. He also thanked Ms. Kate Starr Newell, Deputy Secretary of the Council, for her cooperation during the World Summit for Social Development, and also the conference officers, interpreters and documents officers.

Turning to the work of the Organization in recent years, he said that the United Nations had done highly creative work during the past decade. The series of world conferences and summits held during that period had proved that the Organization was capable of addressing complex political and technical issues and could produce agreements and consensus in order to move forward. Those meetings had helped to shape the human development agenda for the twenty-first century. Throughout that process, the Organization had gone beyond conventional wisdom and existing policies and had proposed alternatives.

With the advent of the crisis of conventional economic wisdom, the contributions of the United Nations during the 1990s were clearly a source of new policies. Many of the problems that had become evident with the emergence of a global economy had been highlighted and addressed, and policies had been proposed that had continually emphasized the real situation of individuals, families, communities and countries, a perspective that only the United Nations had reflected in its plans.

Another contribution of the United Nations was looking at reality in all its complexity in order to understand the interdependence of events and to look at individual issues from a global perspective. No single institution in the multilateral system could provide economic and political stability. The world of today had no room for sectoral solutions to integrated problems. Unfortunately, the multilateral system continued to be divided along sectoral lines, and no means had yet been devised to make it function as a whole. The urgent financial crisis provided an opportunity for a change of course. It was necessary to go beyond the establishment of a new financial framework and ensure that that task was carried out in close cooperation with institutions beyond the financial and monetary field so that development, trade, gender issues and social needs could be addressed in an integrated manner.

As Director-General of ILO, his primary responsibility would be to help clarify that organization's main strategic objectives: employment creation, social protection, tripartism and social dialogue in the context of respect for

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workers' rights. Development and gender would be cross-cutting issues, with a focus on key programmes. Reaching the organization's goals would require the participation of old and new partners and an expanded sense of cooperation and common purpose. He hoped that ILO would be a team player within the United Nations system, contributing its unique specificity as both a public and private institution made up of representatives of Governments, employers and workers. To implement that policy, he looked forward to future meetings of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) and to future sessions of the Council.

The twenty-first century would be the century of equity. There was no more important challenge than giving stability to societies through social justice, human dignity for women and men and an opportunity for workers to claim a fair share of the wealth that they had helped to generate. Thus, the search for equity was an inevitable political and moral imperative. Unless societies had a backbone of common values and commonly accepted norms to guide individual behaviour, they ran the risk of disintegration through violence by arms or markets, exclusion or the indifference of those in power. It was therefore necessary to develop, promote and protect the Charter of the United Nations and all the structures established under it as the only universal value system currently available to humankind.

He had greatly enjoyed his work as a member of the delegate community, which was composed of men and women committed to the search for that unique product of the international system: an agreement, a consensus or a decision to move forward with a particular policy or proposal. He also thanked the representatives of civil society with whom he had worked so closely and who had contributed new, constructive and also, fortunately, controversial ideas. All of that had taken place in an atmosphere of awareness of the sensitivities, realities and needs of others.

All delegates naturally acted according to instructions, yet they had considerable leeway, and although they had to perform their duties as representatives of their respective countries, it was important for them not to lose sight of their own beliefs as they carried out their official functions and not to forget that real women, men and children would be affected by their decisions.

Thus, in closing, he wished to pay a tribute to the delegates who carried on their shoulders the weight of the Charter of the United Nations. In the final analysis, what did or did not happen had a lot to do with those people, who were committed to a broader vision and a common purpose and who had a sense that they were contributing to history simply by doing their jobs well.

Ms. PERSAUD (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, paid a tribute to Ambassador Somavía not only for his work on the Council, but also for his promotion of development issues throughout the United Nations system. A persistent advocate for the cause of Chile, the Ambassador had been an eloquent voice for those who could not speak and a skilled negotiator for social and economic justice. It was his initiative that had laid the foundation for the World Summit for Social Development. As Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Summit, he had worked tirelessly to build partnerships for the improvement of social welfare and the development of the world's most needy and impoverished people.

She drew attention to his work as Chairman of the Third Committee in 1990-1991, as President of the Economic and Social Council in 1993 and 1998 and in the important post of Vice-President of the Council in 1991, 1992 and 1997. His election to the post of Director-General of ILO was a fitting tribute to his consistent advocacy for the betterment of labourers the world over. As developing nations and aware of Ambassador Somavía's enviable negotiating skills in bilateral, multilateral and international forums, the members of the Group of 77 and China looked forward with anticipation to his work in his new post and were convinced that by strengthening the synergy of its tripartite structure, ILO could play a more catalytic role in moulding the international development agenda.

The Group of 77 and China were proud to recognize Ambassador Somavía as the son of a developing country who had made the world's people his cause.

Mr. HENZE (Germany) said that he spoke on behalf of the European Union and that the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated country Cyprus and the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, wished to associate themselves with his statement.

The year 1998 had been a very good one for the Council and its role in the United Nations system. Firstly, the special high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, held in April, had been an important step in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/227. That meeting had proved most successful in helping to improve coordination between the Council and the Bretton Woods institutions. Furthermore, the May session on integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits had provided a useful exchange of experiences and views. Ambassador Somavía's initiatives, which sought to enhance the coordination of United Nations conferences and the follow-up to them in order to strengthen the Council's role, had facilitated the adoption of several substantive resolutions concerning the work of the functional commissions during the Council's substantive session.

The European Union also welcomed the positive outcome of the negotiations concerning the reform of the Council's subsidiary bodies, especially the functional commissions and, in particular, the "four friends". The Council had also achieved remarkable results in the field of human rights and had given concrete expression to the call for a system-wide approach to human rights made in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The Council had also contributed to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action during its operational segment. The European Union welcomed the introduction of a humanitarian segment and the significant improvement in the outcome of the high-level segment.

On behalf of the European Union, he thanked the Secretariat and the entire Bureau of the Council for their performance. Particular recognition was due to Ambassador Somavía for his untiring efforts and professional skill in leading the Council's deliberations. The European Union congratulated the Ambassador on his election to the important post of Director-General of ILO and wished him success in his future endeavours. He also wished to take the opportunity to thank the Vice-Presidents, Ambassador Chowdhury, Ambassador Olhaye, Ambassador Sychou, and Ambassador Fulci, for their work. The European Union would do its best to continue to contribute to the holding of fruitful and constructive discussions in the Council.

Mr. TCHOULKOV (Russian Federation) thanked the President for his work on behalf of the Council during the past year and commended his efforts to

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ensure the success of joint efforts to find solutions to a wide range of complex problems. Under Ambassador Somavía's skilful leadership, the Council had carried out a broad range of tasks in 1998, including the dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions, the special session in May on follow-up of world conferences, the high-level segment of the Council's substantive session and the ministerial communiqué on market access. The intellectual and organizational impetus that Ambassador Somavía had given to the Council's work was proof of the Ambassador's own principle that progress in certain areas depended largely on the persons directly responsible for those areas.

He was confident that Ambassador Somavía would continue to work closely with the Council in his new capacity as Director-General of ILO and wished him success in his new post.

Mr. FULCI (Italy), after recapitulating the work done by Ambassador Somavía on those United Nations bodies in which he had held leadership posts, focused on his work in the Council. The Ambassador had proved capable of promoting the Council's work despite the innumerable technicalities and special issues intrinsic to that body, seeing the trees without ever losing sight of the forest and thereby helping, more than anyone else, to regenerate the Council, making it action- and result-oriented.

In addition to his extraordinary human touch and genuine talent for making friends, Ambassador Somavía had brought to the Council his broad experience, immense learning and, above all, profound vocation for and dedication to the cause of development. His truly unique leadership capacity had allowed him to build a team of colleagues within the Council Bureau whose cooperation had been not only fruitful, but extremely pleasant.

He congratulated Ambassador Somavía on his prestigious appointment as Director-General of ILO and wished him all the best in his new endeavours which, happily, would allow him to remain within the United Nations family.

Mr. TELLO (Mexico) said that Ambassador Somavía's fruitful efforts as head of the Council would ensure that his name and that of Chile were closely and inextricably linked to that of the Council and should fill him with satisfaction.

He wished Ambassador Somavía success in his new post as head of ILO.

Mr. SATOH (Japan) spoke first of the important role played by Ambassador Somavía in a number of United Nations forums and then commended his

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skill at managing meetings and, above all, his vision; those qualities had made him the right person to head the Council as it underwent revitalization.

The Council's substantive session in July 1998 had been well organized; there had been a clear division of labour among members of the Bureau, and each had carried out his obligations faithfully. In addition, there had been several innovations: under Ambassador Somavía's leadership, a high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions had been held and a session had been devoted to the issue of how the Council could improve its implementation and follow-up of recent major United Nations conferences.

Much had been done to strengthen the Council, but it was necessary to build on the achievements of the preceding years to achieve a Council that was fully able to play its role as a coordinating body for the activities of all United Nations bodies in the economic and social fields. Japan was prepared to contribute to that effort.

In conclusion, he wished Ambassador Somavía success in his new responsibilities as Director-General of ILO and pledged that Japan would continue to extend to him its fullest cooperation in his new mission.

Mr. WIBISONO (Indonesia) listed Ambassador Somavía's responsibilities in various United Nations bodies and then focused on his work as President of the Council, especially its 1998 substantive session. That session had been productive, largely thanks to its broader and more participatory nature and to such activities as exchanges of views and panel discussions.

Throughout the five-week session, members had tackled challenges under the various segments, thereby helping to fulfil the Council's major coordination functions and its mandate to make recommendations to the General Assembly.

The resolution on the triennial comprehensive policy review, adopted during the operational activities segment, had highlighted the importance for development of financial resources issues.

In the coordination segment, the agreed conclusions to review the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action had reaffirmed the validity of those instruments while preventing duplication of work by the Council's subsidiary bodies on issues relating to human rights.

During the humanitarian segment, the Council had been able to lay the foundation for strengthened coordination between the bodies of the United



Nations system, Governments and civil society on issues of humanitarian assistance and the resources required for financial assistance.

During the general segment, Council members had been able to focus for the first time on specific areas related to the integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of recent major United Nations conferences. The efficiency with which the individual segments had been scheduled was also commendable.

During the Council's complex and sometimes prolonged negotiations in 1998, Ambassador Somavía had been a valuable resource; under his stewardship, the Council had made progress despite some unfinished business resulting from the complexity of the undertakings.

For its 1999 substantive session, the Council had an elaborate agenda encompassing cross-sectoral issues of an economic, social and political nature, among which reform of the Council itself occupied a prominent place.

His delegation pledged its support to the new President and Bureau in carrying out the Council's work in order to achieve fruitful results, and he congratulated Ambassador Somavía on his election to the post of Director-General of ILO.

Mr. ASADI (Islamic Republic of Iran) praised Ambassador Somavía's abilities as a diplomat and negotiator in multilateral forums, whether as President of the Council, Ambassador of Chile or the father of social development. In addition to his professional competence, the Ambassador had other qualities which would leave a lasting impression in the heart of his friends and colleagues: his character and his worth as a human being, which would make him irreplaceable.

He drew attention to Ambassador Somavía's leadership abilities as head of the Council. It was generally considered that under the Ambassador's leadership, the past year had enriched the work of both the Council and the Third Committee. The remarks made by Ambassador Somavía in his statement embodied his wisdom, intellectual vision and integrity. He wished Ambassador Somavía success in his new post as head of ILO in Geneva.

Mr. SYCHOU (Belarus) recalled Ambassador Somavía's work on the Council over the years and, in particular, during 1998. That year had been an important one because of the efforts to restructure and revitalize United Nations bodies

active in the economic, social and related fields, including the revitalization of the Council itself.

Many delegations had expressed satisfaction with the work done by the Council in 1998, an achievement closely linked to the work done by delegations and to the systematic efforts of the Bureau, particularly its President. He expressed his appreciation to Ambassador Somavía for the Council's achievements, stressing the Ambassador's spirit of cooperation and support for the other members of the Bureau, who had also contributed to the achievement of those results. He congratulated Ambassador Somavía on his appointment as head of ILO and wished him success in his future endeavours.

Ms. KING (United States of America) said that, sadly, Ambassador Somavía's departure would be the Council's loss because of his stature as a President whose service, both in the Council and as Ambassador, had been marked by the achievement of broad consensus. Perhaps his departure should be seen as the Council's effort to stamp its agenda on the multilateral system, and she hoped that he would pursue that approach as a member of ACC.

Despite the Copenhagen Conference and the Council's commitment to the idea that social development, together with economic growth and environmental protection, was the key to sustainability, the ongoing attention paid to that critical issue in the United Nations system had not been commensurate with its importance. If the human person was the subject of development and human rights and fundamental freedoms the birthright of all human beings, then in truth far greater attention must be paid to the welfare and development of the individual. Ambassador Somavía had provided a constant reminder of that obligation, and his new position would again place him at the centre of those relations.

Ambassador Somavía had also been a staunch advocate of reform of the United Nations in general and the Council in particular. During the past year some of the benefits of ideas he had initiated had become apparent, particularly the development of a working relationship between the Council as an intergovernmental body and ACC as an inter-agency body and the increasingly productive cooperation with the international financial institutions. Lastly, she would be remiss if she did not highlight his commitment to civil society and to the idea that common consensus could not be reached by Governments alone.

It had been said that the Council lived or died on the strength of its leadership. The past year had been especially productive owing to the efforts

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of Ambassador Somavía and the other members of the Bureau:  
Ambassadors Chowdhury, Fulci, Olhaye and Sychou. She extended to  
Ambassador Somavía and his colleagues her best wishes and her appreciation for a  
job well done.

Mr. HYNES (Canada) said that, on behalf of his Government, he wished  
Ambassador Somavía success in his new post in Geneva and recognized the  
extraordinary contribution that the Ambassador had made during his time in New  
York. He had played a truly eminent role in the work of the Council and of the  
United Nations economic and social system, and the fact that that system was  
ready to tackle the many problems that had arisen on the eve of the new  
millennium was due largely to his vision and efforts. The Government of Canada  
hoped that he would pursue that approach and would continue to play an active  
role in promoting the interests of Member States, and it looked forward to  
continued cooperation with him in that task, both in ILO and throughout the  
system as a whole.

Mr. CIVILI (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and  
Inter-Agency Affairs) expressed his deep admiration and gratitude to  
Ambassador Somavía for his kindness, generosity and commitment to the ideals of  
the United Nations. As President of the Council, he had demonstrated great  
skill in building teams, not only among Member States but also within the  
Secretariat. No one had done more than Ambassador Somavía, simply through his  
natural leadership abilities and his ability to promote a sense of common goals  
between all United Nations bodies and between intergovernmental bodies and the  
Secretariat. It was therefore natural that he should go on to work in one of  
the most prestigious of the Organization's bodies. What was important was that  
he would remain in the system, since no one would have been willing to lose his  
cooperation.

The Ambassador's intellectual contribution to the United Nations had been  
equally comprehensive, embracing the political, economic and social aspects of  
the Organization's work while stressing the promotion of human progress. While  
serving on the Security Council, he had constantly reminded its members that  
there could be no security without security for human beings. In leading the  
way to the World Summit for Social Development, he had encouraged a broad human  
development perspective and had shown that measures taken in the political,

economic and social fields must go hand in hand with the ultimate goal of improving the human condition.

As President of the Council, he had achieved one of the most important objectives of United Nations reform, that of bringing the image and content of the Council's work into line with the concept enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations by its founders, while bearing in mind the new realities of economic and social relations. It was the general view of Member States that the Council could become an instrument for policy coordination and economic and social progress at a time when it was both possible and necessary to move forward in that area. All the Bretton Woods institutions and all agencies of the system had focused on the Council as never before, and Ambassador Somavía had contributed to that process in many ways, both seen and unseen. New and stronger relationships should be established between ACC, the Council and the General Assembly.

Ms. ROEMER (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), speaking on behalf of the non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council, said that she was deeply grateful for the constant, generous support provided by Ambassador Somavía. The Confederation welcomed his election to the post of Director-General of ILO and assured him that he would always enjoy its enthusiastic support. The New York representatives of the Confederation found it difficult to imagine his absence. He had always reminded his colleagues that the measures taken in that forum affected men, women and children, and his idealism and great humanity would never be forgotten. She thanked him for his friendship and wished him well on his new path.

The PRESIDENT thanked the members of the Bureau with whom he had worked: Ambassadors Fulci, Olhaye, Sychou and Chowdhury. An ambassador's work was always supported by an able team, and he had had the good fortune to have an exceptional team. He thanked the many ambassadors who had honoured him with their presence and the friends who had joined him in the Council's work for their encouraging words, which would help him to face with courage the challenges that he would encounter in the future.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.