

PROVISIONAL

E/1999/SR.15
21 October 1999

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Substantive session of 1999

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 15th MEETING
(FIRST PART)*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 6 July 1999, at 2.30 p.m.

Temporary President: Mr. SOMAVÍA (Director General of the
International Labour
Organization)

President: Mr. FULCI (Italy)

CONTENTS

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

* The summary record of the second part of the meeting appears as
document E/1999/SR.15/Add.1.

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working

languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in
a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this
document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des
Nations, Geneva.

The meeting was called to order at 2.35 p.m.

THE ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT AND WORK IN POVERTY ERADICATION: THE EMPOWERMENT AND ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (agenda item 2) (continued)

Panel discussion: "National policies and international cooperation for employment-oriented growth: impact on poverty reduction and gender equality"

Speaking as Moderator of the panel discussion, Mr. SOMAVÍA (Director General, International Labour Organization (ILO)) introduced the theme by pointing out that the promotion of measures to support employment-oriented growth which both reduced poverty and led to greater gender equality was a difficult, but nonetheless attainable target. It was not merely a question of creating jobs; to ensure a socially just economy and sustainable development, the jobs on offer must be decent. Moreover, given that growth was a prerequisite to the creation of employment, and for it to promote employment in such a way as to benefit the poorest and women, it was necessary to adopt an integrated approach to economic and social development. After introducing and welcoming the panelists, he invited them to take the floor.

Ms. LIZIN (Independent Expert on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty, Commission on Human Rights) stressed the gender dimension of poverty which had been noted by the then Secretary-General in his report to the Commission on the Status of Women of 1993. In democratic countries, poverty eradication and employment generation was a policy priority. The fight against poverty did not depend on the efforts of central governments alone, but, increasingly, on local authorities, which must be able to procure the necessary funding. In order, however, to ensure that no minority groups were excluded, those local authorities must remain accountable to central governments. The enhanced role of civil society and the private sector in empowering women to gain access to employment and to escape poverty had been stressed by the Secretary-General at the Davos Economic Forum. Back-to-work programmes should be established at local and national levels in cooperation with the private sector targeting persons living in extreme poverty, while ensuring gender balance; to that end, training would need to be provided in parallel.

The main obstacles experienced by women who lived in extreme poverty were prostitution and trafficking. Such women frequently carried out low-paid

or unpaid domestic work and lacked civil status and social security. Some progress had, however, been made. Not only had a number of international standards been established, but the United Nations was in the process of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the consideration of all economic, social and cultural rights. She concluded by citing the case of Yemen – which she had considered in her report on human rights and extreme poverty submitted to the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/1999/48) – evoking the unimaginable distress of certain women accused of adultery, whose only hope for survival was to stay in prison.

Ms. ONON (Observer for Mongolia), speaking as Director of the Poverty Alleviation Programme under her country's Ministry of Labour, described the experience of her country. Alongside macroeconomic and structural reforms to stabilize the economy the Government had – in June 1994 – adopted a national poverty alleviation programme for the period up to the year 2000. Designed to address poverty from the human development perspective, the multisectoral programme had six major objectives: to alleviate poverty through economic growth and employment promotion; to protect human capital through improved delivery of education and health services; to reduce women's poverty; to strengthen the social safety net through targeted assistance to poor people who were unable to benefit from new employment opportunities in the short term; to alleviate rural poverty; and to establish institutional structures for implementing and managing programme activities.

The programme was already producing results, in particular: an increased level of employment and income from new businesses; a strengthening of local infrastructure and the creation of short-term employment; greater income and employment opportunities for women; improved living conditions; and the stabilization of poverty in the country. A number of lessons could be drawn from the Mongolian experience. Above all, poverty alleviation activities must be harmonized with employment-intensive and gender-sensitive growth strategies. Further, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must be involved in the implementation of projects at local level. Finally, poverty alleviation efforts were constrained by the fact that the poorest lacked training. Finally, a number of recommendations could be drawn from those lessons: it was important to: promote employment-intensive and gender-sensitive economic growth; to encourage the development of small and

medium-sized enterprises and cooperatives; to promote self-reliance and enhance the self-help capacities of the poor; to stimulate micro-enterprises; to mobilize savings at the local level; and to build partnerships with NGOs, civil society organizations and private-sector corporations.

Mr. ROSATI (Poland), speaking as a member of the Monetary Policy Council of the National Bank of Poland, said that not everybody had benefited from the remarkable global economic growth of the past 50 years. Nor had that growth resulted in the elimination of poverty; rather, it had inflicted damage on the environment, and had not contributed sufficiently to building social solidarity. Inequalities in the distribution of wealth were particularly striking: the richest 20 per cent of people accounted for 86 per cent of world consumption, compared to 1.3 per cent for the poorest 20 per cent. Sustained and balanced economic growth alone would enable such inequities to be reduced or poverty and exclusion to be addressed. For that purpose, resources and appropriate strategies would be required.

A number of lessons could be drawn from the transformation in central and eastern Europe, the financial crises in East Asia and the uneven progress in developing countries overall. The highly uneven results obtained by post-communist countries in transition – despite virtually identical privatization and stabilization programmes – revealed the crucial importance of democratic institutions and social capital; the most successful countries had been those of central Europe where democratic institutions and social capital were the most developed. The recent series of financial crises in East Asia had, moreover, demonstrated the limitations of the East Asian model of development, which was characterized by work and discipline, as well as by strong and active Governments. That model was also, however, prone to arbitrariness, corruption and speculation – hence the vital importance of good governance of public affairs.

The slow rate of economic progress, or even the total lack of progress, in a number of developing countries further underscored the need for traditional development strategies to be reformulated. New strategies should be oriented towards social and human development, and should accord greater importance to institutional capacity-building and social capital, and favour the establishment of honest and effective Governments with a view to achieving a more balanced distribution of capital flows.

Mr. SRINIVASAN (President of the Economics Faculty of Yale University) remarked that poverty was concentrated in a handful of countries and was largely a rural phenomenon. Approximately two thirds of some 1.5 billion people living on less than one dollar a day resided in China or South-East Asia, with China and India alone accounting for over three fifths of the world's poor. National anti-poverty strategies could be grouped into three categories: first, policies that enabled the poor to grow out of their poverty, namely to improve the returns on their assets, mainly through their labour, by means of education, nutrition and health measures, but also their assets in the farm and non-farm enterprises they operated. Second, economy-wide policies in the broadest sense, such as macroeconomic, trade and sectoral policies that generated economic growth of a kind that benefited the poor; lastly, wealth redistribution and transfer policies. There was overwhelming evidence that the first two categories had the greatest impact. Those in the third category, while necessary for the most disadvantaged population groups, such as the sick and the disabled, were not only politically difficult to implement, but even reduced the potentially superior efficiency of the first two. Problems of child health and nutrition, and disparities between males and females in education and in the labour market were largely consequences of household decisions, which were difficult to influence through public policy interventions.

Taking India as an example, he argued that significant reductions in poverty occurred only with rapid growth. Until the 1990s, national development strategies based on inward-oriented industrialization spearheaded by an inefficient public sector had stifled growth and slowed poverty reduction. Redistribution policies had been ineffective in reaching the poor. Investment in education, health and nutrition, which would have helped the poor climb out of poverty, was not only inadequate but poorly allocated as well.

The example of India showed that an outward-oriented foreign trade was most conducive to generating rapid and balanced growth that would contribute to poverty reduction. An open world trading and financial system was essential for participation in multilateral trade negotiations under the auspices of the WTO. In that connection, the third Ministerial Meeting of the WTO scheduled to take place next November in Seattle would doubtless launch

another round of negotiations, including a few demands that developing countries should insist upon, namely: bringing trade in agriculture fully into the WTO by phasing out the European Union's common agricultural policy and the United States' sugar quotas and other distortions; liberalizing the movement of persons so as to profit from their comparative advantages in labour-intensive sectors; deciding once and for all that labour standards would be kept out of the WTO and entrusted to ILO where they belonged; winding up the Committee on Trade and Environment and entrusting environmental issues to UNEP or some other suitable forum; making the use of antidumping measures illegal; taking the intellectual property aspects of trade (TRIPS) out of the WTO and entrusting them to WIPO; and, lastly, amending the provisions relating to preferential trade agreements to ensure that any preferences granted under such agreements were extended to all WTO members.

Mr. PURSEY (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)) said he would focus his remarks on the links between national and international efforts to tackle unemployment, poverty and inequality, and the drive to achieve worldwide respect for core labour standards. The starting point for consideration of those issues must be the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, particularly Commitment 3, under which all States pledged to promote the goal of full employment and to enable all men and women to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods. To that end, the States undertook to safeguard the basic rights and interests of workers and to promote respect for relevant International Labour Organization conventions.

ICFTU was concerned that development policies rarely focused on the world of work as a means of eradicating poverty and eliminating gender discrimination. Work was, after all, the main source of income for most people and the means of producing the goods and services needed to improve the quality of life for everyone. It was where citizens' rights and aspirations often met the harsh realities of the market.

Workers wished to be treated not as commodities, but with respect and dignity. If those very basic values, which were common to all cultures and religious faiths, were abused, people might resort to violent or even criminal behaviour. The lack of decent work not only delighted extremist politicians with simplistic solutions, but threatened social cohesion, democracy, international peace and social and economic development.

It was therefore necessary to build on the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and elaborate a new strategy for social development in an interdependent global economy. In practical terms, all agencies of the United Nations system must join forces to build core labour standards into the system for the governance of the global economy, in three major areas: structural management (IMF and the World Bank), trade policy (WTO), and environmental action (relevant United Nations agencies). In conclusion, he urged institutions involved to start work soon with ILO to arrive at specific proposals for the 2000 conference to review the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration.

Ms. KATSELI (President of the Economics Faculty of Athens University) said that employment generation, gender equality and poverty eradication called not only for good policies, but for the empowerment of policy-making and of policy-makers themselves. For the market to work for all, legitimacy must be restored to policy-making, and governments' and institutions' capacity to act must be strengthened at both the national and the international level. That posed several challenges.

First, employment generation and poverty eradication were not automatically guaranteed through liberalization of trade and markets, but required integrated policies. At the international level, it could mean instituting an economic and social security council to monitor the effectiveness of macroeconomic and social policies. Second, gender equality required that women's priorities should be taken into account in policy-making as manifested through their expenditure patterns, which were more oriented to human priorities (health and education), with more flexible organizational structures.

The third challenge was the sequencing of policies. Regulatory frameworks should be established before liberalization. Foreign direct investment (FDI) should be liberalized before trade and short-term capital flows. In any event, the pace of reform should be determined by the adaptive capacity of the political and economic system.

The fourth challenge was to determine what should be decided globally, regionally, nationally or locally. Was there any reason, for instance, why monetary policies were decided regionally or internationally, while employment or education policies were left to the local and national levels?

Fifth, to meet market failures, there was a need to strengthen oversight and regulatory frameworks, which were extremely weak at the international level. The proposal to create a world financial organization (WFO) fell within that agenda.

Sixth, ways must be found of structuring the social dialogue at the national or supranational level to ensure essential community participation. Tripartite arrangements among employers, unions and Governments, which had proved very useful in the 1960s and 1970s, were not suitable for the new realities of the twenty-first century. NGOs and community organizations, having to deal with the grim realities of poverty, unemployment and marginalization at the local level, should have a say in the direction and mix of macroeconomic policies. Financial managers should occasionally meet those NGO leaders to discuss how efficient portfolio management could be prevented from worsening poverty and inequality.

Ms. GOMEZ (Spain) paid tribute to ILO for its work on behalf of working children and of women who were victims of discrimination. She welcomed the previous speaker's remarks on education, which was a valuable tool for fighting poverty and establishing gender equality. In that regard, the challenges still to be faced concerned the masculinization of the most sought-after professions on the labour market, and unequal remuneration of men and women for the same work.

Mr. FANNIZADEH (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) felt that gender equality called for a two-pronged policy: first, to combat job discrimination, and provide access to education and, above all, legal protection; and, second, to promote the empowerment of women through education and training. The fight against poverty, unemployment and gender inequality required a concerted effort on the part of the relevant international agencies in the economic as well as the social area. The persons affected should be involved in the formulation of sound policies. Accordingly, the ILO principles on freedom of association could serve as a basis for the participation of civil society.

Mr. HAMOUI (Syrian Arab Republic), while endorsing Ms. Lizin's insistence on freedom, democracy and the role of women in the fight against poverty, wondered what course was open to women in developing countries under foreign occupation which, because of that occupation, devoted the bulk of

their budget to defence, to the detriment of socio-economic development. Should the international financial institutions not step up their intervention in that area?

Mr. WINNICK (United States of America) said he could not agree with Mr. Srinivasan that gender equality was a domestic problem. It had been proved that steps at the regional, national and local level to give girls access to education and make women more independent encouraged the establishment of an equal rights climate that strengthened women's economic situation. He had been surprised to hear Ms. Katseli suggest an interventionist approach whereas the other speakers had stressed its ineffectiveness. How far would a human rights-based strategy be useful, in a macroeconomic context, in ensuring economic and social progress?

Mr. PROVE (World Lutheran Federation), speaking on behalf of 25 NGOs, said that current policies of concentrating on growth alone did not necessarily encourage social progress. National measures on behalf of education, employment, the independence of women and the eradication of poverty were essential for bringing about growth that was genuinely beneficial to the poor. They must be associated with the programmes concerning them and, through education, work for a democratic approach to economic policy. The challenges that remained concerned the foreign debt burden of the poor countries, the need to stabilize capital movements, and the breaking down of the wall between economic and social policy.

Mr. RYCHLY (Czech Republic) said that while much was said about the relationship between national and international action, the regional dimension, exemplified by the part played by the Council of Europe and the European Union, should not be forgotten. As part of the task of harmonizing its legislation with that of the European Union, the Czech Republic had adopted several measures in the fields alluded to by the various speakers, such as parental leave, equality of treatment in regard to social security and employment and enhanced protection for workers whose jobs were at risk. The United Nations and its specialized agencies should cooperate more closely with the regional institutions and direct more assistance to the States seeking to enter the European Union.

Mr. AHN (Republic of Korea) said that growth was not an end in itself but a means of redistribution. Production might be governed by the

laws of nature, but redistribution was governed by social laws. A social consensus must be forged, therefore, based on such values as freedom of the press, freedom of association and the rule of law. The recent financial crisis in Asia had shown that a corrupt and authoritarian government could be a real obstacle to an equitable redistribution of the fruits of development. The crisis had also been attributed to incurable optimism on the part of Asian leaders. Quoting from Voltaire's Candide, he promised that, having learned their lesson from the crisis, Asians would no longer play the role of Dr. Pangloss.

Ms. FLOR (Germany) said she would like Mr. Rosati to explain the evolution of the situation of women in the labour market, in Poland for example, and to indicate what measures might be taken to give women equal opportunity in regard to employment, even in the most difficult conditions. She reminded Mr. Srinivasan that, though gender discrimination was sometimes a family matter, States were nevertheless bound to ensure equality of the sexes. In that connection, what could economists do when faced with the consequences of macroeconomic policies that were somewhat sexist in nature? Lastly, how could the commitments entered into by the various Governments at the Copenhagen Summit and the Beijing Conference be incorporated into the decision-making process?

Mr. GOFFIN (Belgium) asked Ms. Lizin to explain the distinction between poverty and extreme poverty. Basically, the question in both cases was the denial of human rights, making such a distinction pointless.

Mr. BRAUZZI (Italy) stressed the need to give pride of place to good governance at the local level and to the role of microcredit as a powerful tool for women's independence. In that regard, the financing of economic activities from microcredit should go beyond the strictly local level, the objective being to integrate the informal sector into the formal economy.

Mr. TANDOR (Observer for Afghanistan) said that a part of Afghanistan was occupied by a movement that not only disregarded but openly trampled upon all the rights of women, denying them access to work, health, education and even hygiene. In the field of education, where women had succeeded in occupying the posts left vacant by men, their absence created a dangerous vacuum. It was the duty of the international community to make it

clear that such movements were out of place on the international scene and that all those who supported, armed, trained and financed them would need to answer for it.

Ms. FERRER (Cuba) welcomed the importance attached to education, which was needed not only to enable women to find work but also to alter stereotypes about the different roles of men and women in the professional world and within the family. In that connection, action needed to be taken at the community level, particularly in respect of professions which had a great influence on the general population (teaching, medicine, higher civil service). Education had a very important place in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which many States had ratified and whose article 11 was explicitly devoted to women's employment. The State had a fundamental role to play in setting up training programmes for women, particularly those in the most vulnerable groups of society.

Ms. LIZIN said it would be easier to combat extreme poverty if the Security Council adopted a resolution on that matter. As far as the action of the international financial institutions was concerned, she would like to convince the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund of the need to bear in mind the real needs of the population and to set up social services for the poor.

She pointed out that her report (E/CN.4/1999/48) did not adopt a North-South perspective. Globalization meant that poverty was now everywhere. The poor countries must be able to adopt legislation on the minimum income, even if it was difficult to do so and even if the guaranteed income was not very high. All countries, developed or developing, should adopt legislation of that kind. As to the difference between poverty and extreme poverty, she explained that it was a question of degree and that, in her view, a start must be made by combating extreme poverty, in other words, in the European countries, by dealing with the homeless and the undocumented.

Mr. ROSATI said that development programmes should not be limited to formulating purely economic or financial objectives but should take account of social objectives, for example by not cutting expenditure on education. In

addition, every possible effort should be made to separate production and distribution in order to realize social objectives. In Central Europe, the transition to a market economy had had unfavourable consequences for women, not in terms of job losses but because the gap in the average wage between men and women had grown wider.

Mr. SRINIVASAN said he did not claim that public policy had no effect on discrimination against women, but he felt that its effectiveness should not be overestimated: discrimination existed within the family. For example, even if there were schools, parents could not be compelled to send their daughters to them. In addition, he was not convinced that signing new international agreements would necessarily advance the cause of human rights. It was essentially at the national level that action must be taken. On the question of the trade union movement in the developing countries, he said that, in general, public policy had consisted of giving a minority rights and privileges that did not correspond to the working and living conditions of the population as a whole.

Mr. PURSEY said that if the governments of the developing countries stopped restricting freedom of association, a viable trade union movement could come into being. As the Asian crisis had shown, financial and social problems were closely linked, as was their solution. Social capital must be created, with union participation. Fundamental labour standards should form part of the national debate and should enable workers, including women, to find solutions to their problems. Those standards must come to be regarded as an integral part of good governance.

Ms. KATSELI thought there was a tendency to ask too much of Governments and policy-makers without clearly defining the questions that were asked. For example, should the minimum income be an integral part of macroeconomic policy or not? Similarly, should trade policy take into account labour standards? On the subject of the role of national and international policy, experience had shown that, in some cases, the realization of national objectives was facilitated when international developments moved in the same direction.

The meeting was suspended at 4.30 p.m. and resumed at 4.40 p.m.

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

Mr. Fulci took the Chair.

Mr. ORDJONIKIDZE (Russian Federation) said that, despite the progress made since the fourth World Conference on Women and since the World Summit for Social Development, women throughout the world were continuing to suffer from poverty, unemployment and a deterioration in social protection. In order to rectify the situation there was a need for international cooperation in relation to labour legislation, to the employment of women and to public awareness.

Women had been affected more than other vulnerable groups by the decline in living standards following the socio-economic transformations that had taken place in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The Russian Government was doing its best to alleviate the social consequences of the economic and financial crisis of 1998. In 1999 it had increased the funds allocated to social programmes, improving the living standards of State-employed teachers and physicians and of other groups of officials consisting mainly of women. Also, it was taking care to ensure that family allowances were paid regularly. Besides family planning and the prevention of violence against women, it attached great importance to the situation of women with regard to job creation, the development of the entrepreneurial spirit, management training, and promotion to senior positions. International bodies should show more concern for improving the socio-economic situation of women when drawing up their projects for technical assistance to the countries in transition.

Women were the first victims of the use of force in regional conflicts, especially of acts which contravened the Charter of the United Nations. Nothing could justify the deliberate and systematic destruction of the civil, social and humanitarian infrastructure in Yugoslavia or in any other country. Similarly, unilateral embargoes were illegal and incompatible with the objectives of socio-economic development at the national and the international level. It was time that the Economic and Social Council, in cooperation with the Security Council, examined the socio-economic consequences of sanctions for entire populations, and especially for women and other vulnerable groups.

Ms. FERRER (Cuba) said that inequalities and social exclusion had been exacerbated by the effects of economic neo-liberalism and an anti-democratic and unjust international order. The countries of the North were to a significant extent responsible for the underdevelopment of the countries of the South, which was being aggravated by neo-liberal globalization. Women were the first to be affected by unemployment, poverty and increasing violence. At the national level, it was necessary to eliminate the inequalities existing between men and women in the economic, social, domestic and political spheres. At the international level, it was necessary to establish a new democratic order which would guarantee the participation of all in decision-making.

The policy of sustainable and equitable development pursued by the Cuban Government was based on the participation of women in all political, economic, social and cultural activities. Despite Cuba's economic difficulties, the employment of women had increased. Similarly, in the area of international cooperation, Cuba had rendered to countries of the South humanitarian, technical and professional assistance which could serve as an example to more developed countries. She condemned the blockade imposed by the Government of the United States and referred to a complaint against the United States lodged by the Federation of Cuban Women and other grass-roots organizations with the municipal court of Havana. Despite the disapproval of the United Nations General Assembly, the Government of the United States was intensifying its blockade, which was particularly affecting women and children, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law.

Ms. GONZÁLEZ FERNÁNDEZ DE SOLÁ (Observer for Argentina) said that it was necessary to take measures with a view to integrating and empowering women, and especially with a view to enabling them to enter into loan agreements. In Argentina, there were more women in employment but also more women unemployed or underemployed. Even if they were better educated than men, they had greater difficulty in obtaining jobs requiring high qualifications. They were paid less than men for equal work. The Argentine authorities had taken a range of measures to ensure equality of opportunity in the job market and to bring employment openings to the attention of women. In Latin America, the number of poorly paid jobs had been increasing in step with growing job insecurity.

She reaffirmed her support for maintaining the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. Also, she requested the international lending institutions to see to it that Governments, in carrying out programmes financed by those institutions, took into account the situation of women. It was necessary to help those belonging to the most vulnerable sections of society before crises occurred.

Ms. BELLAMY (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) emphasized the fundamental importance of education for all as a factor in economic and social development. In a rapidly changing world, it was more than ever necessary to provide all young people with the means of finding their place in tomorrow's job market and becoming fully-fledged citizens. A direct correlation was now known to exist between poverty and level of education. Also, it was known that the stimulation of young children and the care taken of them from the outset were essential for their future development. The focus of UNICEF in the twenty-first century would therefore be on three imperatives: ensuring the welfare of infants; ensuring that all children had access to high-quality education; and ensuring that adolescents had ample opportunity to develop their full potential and become integrated into economic and social life.

Within that global context, UNICEF would place special emphasis on the education of girls. As well as being an important means of breaking out of the spiral of poverty and underdevelopment, the education of girls was the key to equality between men and women, in the workplace and elsewhere. In that connection, UNICEF was adopting a programmatic approach whose results at the country level were encouraging. In ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Governments had undertaken to ensure that all children received a high-quality basic education. In order to honour that undertaking, however, they needed the support of various sectors of society and of the international community as a whole. It would therefore be for UNICEF, together with the Economic and Social Council, to assist them in their vital task.

Mr. MESSMER TRIGO (Bolivia) said that, in order to combat poverty and social inequalities, it was necessary to establish programmes of social justice and an economic system based on solidarity. With vulnerable population groups and poor countries hardest hit by the crises which the international financial system had been unable to prevent, there was a need

for international cooperation in finding effective remedies to the undesirable consequences, while at the same time generating the necessary political will on the part of national authorities. Improving the quality of elementary education, vocational training and higher education, making scientific and technical training accessible to as many people as possible and creating basic sanitation and health infrastructures were essential for social development.

The Bolivian Government favoured closer integration of the activities of the Council and ILO. However, it did not consider it desirable to encourage the development of the informal sector as a response to the problem of unemployment.

In Bolivia, the macroeconomic policies applied since the middle of the 1980s had led to a more efficient allocation of resources and, at the same time, to increased investment by Bolivian and foreign investors. The result had been new employment opportunities, especially for persons with intermediate or high qualifications. The launching of micro-projects centred around small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) had also been a factor in development. The aim was to ensure that the products of economic activity directly benefited poor population groups, not intermediaries.

In the light of its experience, the Bolivian Government was convinced that, in combating poverty, one should endeavour not only to eliminate social injustice and inequality but also to develop the human potential necessary for stimulating economic progress.

Ms. TAVAREZ MIRABAL (Observer for the Dominican Republic) said that the past decade had been of enormous importance for the empowerment and social, economic and political advancement of women in her country. However, problems of access to jobs remained. In 1996, the unemployment rate had been 19.45 per cent overall but 28.7 per cent for women. In order to combat unemployment, the Government had launched programmes benefiting SMEs, created customs-free zones where women accounted for 52 per cent of the workforce, improved the quality of educational services, increased various social benefits, and begun implementing a plan of action for reducing poverty. That had led to the creation of 300,000 jobs in three years, which had resulted in a reduction in the overall unemployment rate to 13 per cent.

At the juridical level, several laws had been adopted with a view to combating the discrimination of which women were victims in public life and in

the family. The problem of violence against women had become a top priority of the Government, which had taken a whole range of specific steps: the creation of special mechanisms, the opening of reception and legal advice centres, the launching of public awareness campaigns, etc. Mention should also be made of the ratification in 1995 of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women and the recent establishment of a National Commission to Combat Violence in the Family.

With regard to questions of parity, the Directorate-General for the Advancement of Women was organizing educational programmes for public officials and policy-makers, and a national plan for achieving equity as between the sexes was being drawn up.

In conclusion, she drew attention to the difficulties being experienced by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, which had its headquarters in Santo Domingo. Her delegation was looking forward to studying the reports on that subject which were to be submitted by the Institute's Board of Trustees and the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit.

Mr. NORDMANN (Observer for Switzerland) said that he attached particular importance to the following aspects of the struggle against poverty: the need for economic growth with greater integration of the social and ecological dimensions; greater consideration of the informal sector; and measures to ensure the widest possible access to employment. In his opinion, public authorities, acting in close collaboration with civil society, had a three-fold role to play in the promotion of true equality between men and women: eliminating discrimination, especially in regard to pay and treatment at the place of work; creating conditions that would make possible a genuine sharing of responsibilities within the family; and revising the system for the protection of female employees.

Following up on the Beijing Conference, Switzerland had launched an ambitious plan of action aimed at improving the male-female balance in various fields. At the international level, States should endeavour to ensure that basic working standards were ratified and respected, at the same time ensuring that those standards did not become a new instrument of protectionism. The Swiss Government proposed that further thought be given to the question of new

forms of work, and it would like to see the major multinational enterprises involved more closely in a development strategy favouring job creation, the advancement of women and the struggle against exclusion. He recalled his support for the 20/20 Initiative. Lastly, he said he was pleased that the issue of male-female parity was now being taken into account in all ILO programmes, but expressed the wish for indicators which would permit a more precise analysis of disparities between men and women and also among women themselves.

Mr. PALOUŠ (Czech Republic) said that in his country women were basically not at a disadvantage relative to men with regards either to employment or to access to education. Paid work for women had become the norm in Czech society. Women accounted for 45 per cent of university students and represented the majority in tertiary non-university education. The unemployment rate, which had been rising since 1996, was about 8 per cent – 7 per cent for men and 10 per cent for women; the difference had become significant only recently. Male-female earnings differentials had widened since 1996 owing to the recession. However, it would be wrong to speak of the systematic feminization of poverty during the past 10 years.

Describing the ideas of the Czech Government regarding the link between civil and political rights and social and economic rights, he said that those rights constituted an indivisible whole warranting active measures of protection by the Government. The exercise of those rights also presupposed genuine dialogue, especially within the framework of joint bodies with equal representation of the various parties. The Czech Republic, which wished to join the European Union, would soon be incorporating the European Social Charter into its legislation. Accordingly, it had associated itself with the European Union statement made during the high-level segment and intended to play a more active role in international cooperation for development and in the rendering of humanitarian assistance.
