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Chair: Mr. Braun (Luxembourg)
later: Ms. Farngalo (Vice-Chair) (Liberia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 25: Social development (continued)
(A/74/184)

(a) Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (continued) (A/74/135 and A/74/205)

(b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, persons with disabilities and the family (continued) (A/74/61-E/2019/4, A/74/133, A/74/170 and A/74/170/Corr.1, A/74/175 and A/74/206)

1. **Mr. Bhandari** (Nepal) said that Nepal was implementing policies to foster social, economic and political inclusion and to empower all segments of society. It had established an affirmative action programme for government positions to make the management of State affairs inclusive and had introduced a range of social protection programmes, including cash transfer programmes that benefited those most in need. The Government had also launched a contributory social security scheme covering the formal sector. Those initiatives, and others, were grounded in the rights-based Nepalese Constitution.

2. Due to limited resources, the Government was focusing its social protection efforts on senior citizens, single women, marginalized ethnic groups, persons with disabilities and fully incapacitated persons. The measures taken had already contributed to reducing economic dependency and inequality, thereby enhancing citizens' dignity and self-confidence. Additional policy measures, including the implementation of a progressive taxation system and minimum wage and the creation of youth entrepreneurship and employment programmes, were also helping to reduce inequality.

3. National efforts alone could not eliminate poverty and inequality, and international development partners should complement and support nationally-led initiatives. All stakeholders should put into practice the recommendations that had emerged from best practices, follow through on their commitments and offer encouragement and resources.

4. **Mr. Phansourivong** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that in the last few months a tropical storm had caused flooding in most provinces of his country, as well as significant damage to infrastructure, agriculture and livelihoods. Significant resources were needed to repair the destruction.

5. The Lao Government attached great importance to social development and was prioritizing the development and delivery of basic social services, including education, health care and support for income-generation. It had mobilized resources for its eighth five-year socioeconomic development plan, covering the period from 2016 to 2020, which was designed to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas. Along with other strategies and programmes, the plan was expected to support the country's graduation from the least developed country category by 2030. The Government had invested significantly in improving access to health care with a view to achieving universal health coverage by 2025: pregnant women, children under 5 years of age and the poor now received free services, and a new law ensured that all citizens had access to health-care services. However, challenges remained, such as the threat of a reduction in external support for maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, immunization and family planning services.

6. As a result of government efforts, in 2016 net primary enrolment had stood at 98.8 per cent, with a gender parity index of 0.98. Nevertheless, major challenges remained, including in efforts to eradicate illiteracy and strengthen secondary and further education, both to prepare young people for the labour market of the future and increase economic output. In May 2019, the Government had promulgated a law to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. Lastly, while development should be nationally owned, an enhanced global partnership was needed to support developing countries.

7. **Ms. Rodríguez Abascal** (Cuba) said that social justice, solidarity, equality and respect for human rights were essential to ensure the survival of the human species. The developed countries should comply with their official development assistance (ODA) commitments; promote a just international economic order; end protectionist and discriminatory trade policies that affected countries in the South; consciously assume their historical responsibility for the environmental crisis; and allocate to development the significant resources that were currently devoted to war.

8. In support of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, Cuba had implemented a strategy aimed at promoting the comprehensive development, self-realization and full social integration of persons with disabilities. The country's youth policy also had a strong social component, focusing on providing training and employment opportunities for young people and ensuring their participation and representation in decision-making processes. With

regard to the elderly, Cuba welcomed the report presented on the third review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. In a country in which it was estimated that there would be 3.3 million people aged 60 years or over by 2030, attention to the elderly was a priority.

9. Cuba had already met several targets of the Sustainable Development Goals despite the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed for almost 60 years by the United States of America. The embargo had worsened as a result of the irresponsible actions of the current Administration, and it had a direct impact on her country's social development. Cuba continued to share its modest resources to support the sustainable development of countries in need; in that regard, there were currently more than 29,000 Cuban health professionals serving in 66 countries.

10. **Mr. Rugeles** (Colombia) said that his country's development plan, which covered the period from 2018 to 2022, set out inclusive social development policies that were designed to translate the benefits of economic growth into well-being, real opportunities and better living conditions for all. Gender equality and the inclusion of vulnerable groups were indispensable for strong, democratic societies and sustainable development. Colombia had supported and promoted international agreements on social issues, including on gender, childhood, youth, families, ageing, health, sexual and reproductive rights, migration and education, and had enacted policies to ensure their full implementation. In 2018, 7.6 million women had benefited from poverty eradication programmes, enabling them to enhance their families' well-being. A scheme known as the Equity Pact addressed the various dimensions of development with a view to bridging the existing gaps among individuals and among regions.

11. Despite those advances, his country faced an enormous challenge: the Venezuelan migration crisis was putting immense pressure on Colombian social services, exhausting national and local capacity, particularly in the realms of health, education and child protection. Colombia was host to 1.4 million of the approximately 4 million Venezuelans who had fled their country since 2015. It was therefore imperative that the international community galvanize greater resources to support the considerable efforts being made by his Government to accommodate the migrants.

12. **Mr. Wu Haitao** (China) said that in the 70 years since its founding, the People's Republic of China had made vast progress. Its aggregate economy had become the second largest in the world, and the Government had provided a basic level of food security for its population

of nearly 1.4 billion, lifted some 850 million people out of poverty and established the largest education, social protection and health-care systems in the world. Those achievements were the fruits of the hard work of the Chinese people and their industry, wisdom and courage. They bore out the fact that socialism, with Chinese characteristics, was the right path for the country and should be unswervingly pursued for a long time to come.

13. In parallel with its own development, China had actively promoted development around the world. Through its foreign aid over the last 60 years, China had provided \$400 billion worth of assistance and dispatched over 600,000 personnel to 166 countries and international organizations. It had provided medical assistance to 69 countries and on seven occasions had granted unconditional debt relief for mature, interest-free government loans for least developed or heavily indebted poor countries.

14. Despite its progress and like other developing countries, China still had to contend with the acute problem of inadequate and unbalanced development. Further efforts were needed to alleviate poverty, and the development gap between urban and rural areas remained significant. China would like to collaborate with other developing countries to promote their common interests, and to increase cooperation with all countries of the world to promote shared, equitable and balanced development and achieve common prosperity.

15. **Mr. Carazo** (Costa Rica) said that Costa Rica prioritized social development. The country was advancing towards universal health coverage, with 95 per cent of the population already covered and approximately 8 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) invested in the health sector. It was also fostering an inclusive education system, which incorporated programmes to encourage students to stay in or return to formal education.

16. Inefficiency in the execution of public policies or the allocation of resources had a negative impact on well-being, while also breeding corruption and mistrust in public institutions. Accordingly, the production and collection of data, harmonization of State strategies for closing development gaps and the responsible, appropriate use of public resources were of the utmost importance. The country's plan for development and public investment, which covered the period until 2022, had 270 targets and seven focus areas that the Government had linked, for the first time, to the Sustainable Development Goals, in an effort to ensure that State entities were taking a multidimensional, comprehensive approach to well-being.

17. Social development policies and programmes should support vulnerable groups, including persons of African descent, persons living with disabilities, migrants and refugees, persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities and older persons. Effective equality between women and men was not only an ethical imperative, but also an opportunity for inclusive growth. Lastly, it was important to address the social impact of rising global temperatures and increased risk of disasters, which were perpetuating and exacerbating inequalities.

18. **Mr. Mabhongo** (South Africa) said that, like many other countries, South Africa was affected by the slow rate of global economic growth. In the current international situation, close cooperation between countries was needed to close the inequality gap. Investment in youth, through the provision of quality education and skills development, was vital to sustainable development efforts, particularly for countries with a large youth population, like South Africa. Groups of unemployed young people could easily be mobilized to cause social unrest, and they could pose a direct threat to social cohesion.

19. The current South African Administration had prioritized seven social development objectives, namely: economic transformation and job creation; education, skills and health; consolidation of the social wage through the provision of quality basic services; spatial integration, human settlements and local government; social cohesion and safe communities; a capable, ethical and development-oriented State; and a better Africa and a better world. Guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Government was working to improve the living standards and health of all South Africans, particularly the most vulnerable, including by developing a national health insurance scheme with a view to achieving universal health coverage.

20. Efforts must be made to ensure the full inclusion and participation of older persons in social, economic, cultural, civil and political life. Equally, there was a need for policies and legislation to ensure dignity, inclusion and access to services for persons with disabilities. South Africa believed that families in all their forms played a valuable role in social development, and social protection policies therefore provided for child support grants, disability grants and pensions for older persons.

21. **Mr. de Souza Monteiro** (Brazil) said that his Government had reformed its family stipend programme, increasing benefits for more than 14 million families. Another programme helped those receiving

government social assistance to find formal jobs. Cognizant of the fundamental role played by the family in social development, Brazil was strengthening programmes such as Happy Child, an initiative that monitored and supported the health of children under 6 years of age who lived in poverty or were otherwise vulnerable. The programme had won a World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) award.

22. The Government was addressing the country's high rate of youth unemployment through a number of initiatives to create jobs, improve employability, raise levels of education and training and expand vocational offerings. Various government departments were focusing on issues related to older persons, such as lifelong learning and economic independence, and a reform of the national pension system was under way. Persons with disabilities benefited from special day centres, an inclusive school system and universal access to health care. As the fostering of social development should not be the duty of Governments alone, Brazil had established a programme known as Voluntary Homeland through which government, civil society and private actors all took part in activities that promoted culture, education and sustainability, and which benefited the most vulnerable groups.

23. **Ms. Hassan** (Egypt) said that Egypt had been among the first countries to adopt national plans for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government was currently issuing an updated Egypt Vision 2030, following consultations with all sectors of society. The right to health care should be universal, and the Government had accordingly launched a range of health-related initiatives, including the 100 Million Healthy Lives campaign, which focused on detecting hepatitis C and addressing non-communicable diseases. Thanks to the campaign, more than 60 million citizens had been screened, and those in need of treatment were receiving it. The Government was also in the early phases of establishing a universal health-care programme and had put in place initiatives that specifically addressed women's and children's health. A 2018 law guaranteed proper funding for health care.

24. As young people comprised more than half of her country's population, the Government was engaging young people in decision-making through a number of youth seminars and various initiatives designed to prepare young people for the world of work. Noting that the Secretary-General, in his report on policies and programmes involving youth (A/74/175), had used language that had not been agreed by consensus, she called on him to adhere to his mandate and not to use such language.

25. Her country's efforts relating to health and young people went hand in hand with additional efforts to empower women, support persons with disabilities and care for the elderly.

26. **Ms. Pobee** (Ghana) said that, through a number of initiatives, her country had reduced poverty from 28.5 per cent to 24.5 per cent over a decade. The national social protection policy encompassed five major initiatives that addressed poverty, nutrition for school children, health, public works and education. The first initiative, which provided for cash transfers to extremely poor households, had recently been expanded, and the Government of Ghana was also seeking to create opportunities for its beneficiaries to earn sustainable livelihoods.

27. The Government's long-standing commitment to protecting its citizens' health had led it most recently to develop a road map for the achievement of universal health care. However, financing the national health insurance scheme posed a challenge, and her Government continued to seek sources of funding for that purpose. With regard to Sustainable Development Goal 4, on education, senior high school in Ghana continued to be free, and high school enrolment had increased by 36 per cent between 2017 and 2018. To meet the growing demand for secondary education, the Government had introduced an alternating schedule as a temporary measure in 400 schools. It meant that some 181,000 students who would otherwise have been denied places owing to space constraints were now receiving a secondary education.

28. **Mr. Adaba** (Suriname), speaking as a youth delegate, said that young people should be more involved in discussions on poverty eradication, quality education and climate action. The global community must do more to address poverty worldwide, especially because poverty at a young age could lead to poverty later in life. While education was an important tool for combating poverty, the lack of infrastructure in Suriname hindered access to education, and the cost of higher education meant that access was even more limited. Moreover, there were clear socioeconomic disparities between rural areas, coastal areas and the interior. All young people should have equal educational opportunities. Lastly, as young people would be affected by climate change in the future, they would rather take action immediately, and they should be explicitly involved in the process.

29. **Ms. Moatti** (Israel), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the young people of Israel were eager to find innovative ways to make a positive impact in the world, in keeping with their country's entrepreneurial spirit.

The notions of helping others, compassion and innovation were deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and underpinned the success of Israel as a nation. Israelis had always sought to assist others, even when times were hard, as evidenced by the many Israeli students who put their studies or careers on hold to make contributions in communities around the world. For example, she had recently joined other young Israelis in Uganda, participating in a project to help rural women to gain skills and knowledge they needed to become financially independent.

30. Although Israel was best known for companies involved in billion-dollar deals, it was the country's socially-oriented start-ups that truly embodied its spirit. It was the businesses founded on the core Israeli values of innovation and compassion that inspired the country's youth. Young people across Israel were seeking to make Israel an "impact nation", to use the country's human resources and capacity for innovation that would accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, because entrepreneurship should create opportunities for all to thrive, regardless of race, religion, gender or nationality.

31. **Mr. Kemayah, Sr.** (Liberia) said that in October 2018, his Government had launched a people-centred national development plan, based on four pillars: people's empowerment, the economy and job creation, sustainable peace, and good governance and transparency. Social protection and better access to health care were priorities under the plan. Recent government initiatives, including a cash transfer programme, various food transfer programmes and general subsidies for food and utilities, had enhanced food security, facilitated access to health care and education for the elderly, women and children, improved the incomes of the working poor and increased entrepreneurial opportunities for young people. Furthermore, the national development plan included eight clear health-related targets, which included reducing maternal and child mortality, reducing malnutrition among children under 5 years, expanding health-care services for those residing more than 5 kilometres from a health-care facility and ensuring the consistent provision of medicines and medical supplies to all public health facilities.

32. Cognizant of the fact that universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals could not be achieved in isolation, his Government continued to support multilateral efforts, mobilize domestic resources, share lessons learned and best practices, build partnerships, including global public-private partnerships, and strengthen national-level coordination.

33. **Mr. Unter** (Austria), youth delegate, said that the climate crisis had led to one of the biggest mobilizations of young people in history, and the marches in Austria had driven the national Parliament to declare a state of climate emergency. Austria had strong youth political participation, with a voting age of 16 years and a legally established national youth council, which meant that young people were involved in making decisions that affected them. Unfortunately, that was not the reality worldwide, and he called on Member States to foster greater youth political participation, especially in the context of climate action.

34. Environmental and climate concerns were a matter of equity: everyone's actions impacted the quality of habitats around the globe. Action must be taken to change the fact that eco-friendly products and services were much more expensive than those produced and offered without consideration of their environmental impacts. For instance, by supporting sustainable local agriculture, people would not only reduce carbon dioxide emissions but also improve living conditions in other countries. It was important to foster research into alternative materials, so that single-use plastic consumption could be drastically reduced. If plastic production and consumption patterns remained unchanged, by 2050 there would be more plastic than fish in the sea by weight. That would hugely harm, in particular, those societies that depended on the sea's resources. That was merely one example of the clear link between research and innovation on environmental protection and the protection of fundamental human rights.

35. Young people were alarmed by the situation, and they knew what needed to be done. But action was needed now, and young people must be recognized as key stakeholders in relation to climate change, so that they could act to protect their future and the future of generations to come.

36. **Ms. Banaken Elel** (Cameroon) said that action must be taken in migrants' countries of origin, transit and destination to ensure that they were not left behind. Cameroon had put equality and social justice at the heart of its policies and programmes, convinced that the way forward was to adopt the holistic solution to social exclusion proposed in the note by the Secretariat on the world social situation 2019: shaping the future of inequality (A/74/135).

37. Cameroon was positioning itself as an emerging democratic country that was united in its diversity. Those aspirations shaped its national development programme, which focused on ensuring inclusive decision-making, equitable redistribution of wealth and

the elimination of social discrimination. The Government's actions geared towards social inclusion targeted groups such as young people, older persons, those with disabilities and indigenous peoples. For example, the State guaranteed persons with disabilities equitable access to essential social services and had adopted regulations to guide the application of its law on their protection. Similar steps had been taken to protect other groups, including migrants. The ultimate objective of all the Government's initiatives was to facilitate comprehensive social integration, which was a precondition for equitable development and lasting social peace.

38. *Ms. Farnigalo (Liberia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

39. **Ms. Ibrahim** (Brunei Darussalam) said that young people accounted for some 44 per cent of her country's population, and therefore the youth agenda was a top priority. Brunei Darussalam was making a number of efforts to empower young people in the face of globalization and the digital revolution, such as establishing platforms for young people to lead discussions on issues such as poverty eradication and entrepreneurship. Among those platforms was the first National Youth Congress, which had been held in June 2019.

40. The Government was also working to harness the entrepreneurial potential of the country's youth, including by enhancing existing capacity-building programmes and providing financial support and preferential market access for young entrepreneurs. In 2018 it had launched the Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, which brought together all of the business-development initiatives available to young people, with a view to fostering the development and expansion of youth-led businesses. To date, 60 government contracts had been secured for youth-owned companies, and the Government hoped to have awarded 200 contracts to young people by 2021. It continued to implement programmes and policies that ensured youth participation in national development efforts.

41. To acknowledge young people's contribution and motivate youth engagement, National Youth Day was celebrated on 1 August every year. The theme of the 2019 event had been technology and entrepreneurship, and awards had been given to young people who were developing platforms that would enable other young citizens to gain employment or showcase their businesses. The Government was in the final stages of reviewing an updated youth policy and strategy that was based on inclusive consultations in which young people from all walks of life had taken part. It was also

consistent with the World Programme of Action for Youth.

42. **Mr. Lam Padilla** (Guatemala) said that his Government's commitment to individual and social development was evidenced by the Guatemalan Constitution, which protected the overall development of the individual, as well as a range of other individual and social rights. Middle-income countries such as Guatemala faced structural gaps, such as low productivity and challenges in guaranteeing access to health care, potable water, education and other essentials. Unequal access caused the most harm to children, young people, persons with disabilities and older persons.

43. International migration was a critical topic for Guatemala. The number of international migrants had grown alarmingly, from an estimated 170 million in 2000 to more than 250 million in 2017. Xenophobic slogans and other manifestations of intolerance affected Guatemalan migrants of all ages in their countries of transit and destination. His country would be willing to work with others on a holistic migration governance system that was predicated on respect for human rights and the ideals of safe, orderly and regular migration.

44. **Ms. Parenti** (Italy), speaking as a youth delegate, said that cultural heritage enabled young people to connect with the future and the past simultaneously, and could create a new framework in which the younger generation were protagonists in the struggle to find climate change solutions and to achieve peace, security and economic growth. Cultural heritage was varied, ranging from concrete monuments to intangible traditions. In the context of globalization and its ensuing tensions, a deep connection to cultural heritage was essential for building a fairer future, with young people as leaders. Italy had traditionally advocated the use of cultural heritage as a tool for peace and development. It had placed culture at the centre of the peace and security agenda by promoting, along with France, Security Council resolution [2347 \(2017\)](#), which addressed the destruction and trafficking of cultural heritage in armed conflict. Italy had also been the first country to have gendarmerie units that specialized in protecting cultural heritage. As the organizer of the first-ever Group of 7 meeting on culture, held in Florence in 2017, Italy had proudly reaffirmed its unyielding commitment to the protection of cultural heritage, which was a driver of cooperation, sustainability and peace.

45. **Mr. Mostratisi** (Italy), speaking as a youth delegate, said that youth could be a vector in promoting a culture of peace and non-violent dialogue. In the Italian city of Rondine, young people from all over the

world had taken part in a programme designed to foster understanding among the younger generation and enable young people to overcome prejudices through the mutual study of cultures. Cultural differences, in the broadest terms, could be a source of conflict, but when young people focused on mutual understanding through the study of cultural heritage, they were empowered to prevent conflicts and take on a key role in building and consolidating peace. The role of youth in the conservation of cultural landscapes and in safeguarding traditional knowledge, values and practices would enhance the resilience of communities to disasters and climate change.

46. In the globalized era, it was vital to discuss cultural heritage. Close examination of monuments and buildings revealed them to be tangible witnesses to the fact that groups in conflict either shared common roots or had coexisted peacefully in the past. A dynamic quest for heritage preservation characterized by youth exchanges could pave the way towards a world where prejudices and discrimination would be greatly diminished. Wars began in human minds, so it was in human minds that the defence of peace must be constructed.

47. **Ms. Batyrbekova** (Kyrgyzstan) said that Kyrgyz young people attached particular importance to Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education and Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth. Learning outcomes measured by international and national assessments indicated a need to improve Kyrgyz students' learning and performance, which would require more highly qualified teaching staff and higher levels of access to preschool education. Youth unemployment was a major problem in her country; young people comprised the largest segment of the labour market and the supply of labour outstripped demand. The education system must better equip young people with the skills and qualifications that the modern labour market required. Strengthening the education system would not only help to reduce youth unemployment, it would also support youth entrepreneurship, and national financial institutions should promote and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services, including loans for starting businesses.

48. **Ms. de Silva** (Sri Lanka), speaking as a youth delegate, said that her country's long-standing welfare policies provided free education and health care to all citizens. However, the youth skills gap and youth unemployment were significant challenges. In response, her Government had established a youth development programme and a technical and vocational education policy, as well as offering vocational training to

vulnerable young prisoners. It had adapted the national volunteering policy to reduce barriers to volunteering. Sri Lanka needed to address social disparities in access to education, which especially affected those in post-conflict areas and in the plantation sector. Various educational projects were being implemented with a view to strengthening the free education policy and reducing unemployment. Sri Lanka was heavily impacted by climate change, and Sri Lankan youth had the capacity to assist in tackling that pressing issue.

49. **Mr. Edirisooriya** (Sri Lanka), youth delegate, said that young people must learn from the past and find ways to move forward, and they should be guided in the process of healing and reconciliation. Such action was more relevant than ever following the bomb attacks that had taken place in his country on Easter Sunday in April 2019. Those attacks had shown the resilience of the Sri Lankan people, and of its young people in particular: they had rallied to help those in need, regardless of race, ethnicity or religion.

50. It was encouraging that the hard work of the country's young people was being recognized through the establishment of advocacy platforms such as a youth parliament. The young people of Sri Lanka had the ability to collectively affect great change, but their work had only just begun.

51. **Ms. Imene** (Namibia) said that her Government's laws, policies and programmes were designed to reduce inequality, including by providing for free education and for health care that was almost free. The Government had made efforts to ensure that qualified teachers and other resources were evenly distributed across rural and urban areas, to address the root causes of inequality and promote equal opportunities for decent work. Her Government had made health care a priority, and as a result Namibia had surpassed the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) 90-90-90 targets well ahead of the target date of 2020. Its next goal was to eradicate mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

52. Namibia continued to suffer the effects of climate change, including a recent severe drought which had led to the loss of crops, livestock and livelihoods. The drought was particularly devastating because the majority of Namibian communities were agriculture-dependent. The Government and the international community had provided food and other forms of much-needed aid. As the 2018–2019 Chair of the South African Development Community, Namibia had assisted other countries affected by climate change by taking charge of humanitarian appeals for Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, which had been hit by hurricanes in 2019.

53. Namibian legislation, most notably the Constitution, ensured that the country had one of the most comprehensive social protection systems on the African continent. Nevertheless, much remained to be done to develop robust socioeconomic infrastructure, and Namibia remained committed to the targets set out in its national development plan and to the Sustainable Development Goals.

54. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that his Government's emphasis on national reconciliation and unity had facilitated a rapprochement of the country's political, economic and religious actors, and the implementation of people-centred development plans that were built around the family and poverty eradication. The establishment of partnerships between the Government, businesses and workers and the rolling out of more than 40 social programmes and projects had enabled Nicaragua to achieve internationally recognized economic growth and social development targets.

55. Nicaragua would continue its programme of land redistribution and had set a number of targets covering areas such as water and sanitation, telecommunications, health, environmental issues, job creation, education and housing, with a view to better protecting its citizens' political, economic, social and cultural rights. The Government was also facilitating the establishment of various centres for agricultural research and technical training. The rights of persons with disabilities were promoted through a programme called "A voice for all" and protected by a dedicated disability law.

56. **Mr. Hassani Nejad Pirkouhi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that States must adopt an appropriate mix of policies and programmes to ensure social inclusion. The international community and development partners had the responsibility to support their efforts or, at the very least, to avoid imposing harmful measures that hindered their progress. The imposition of illegal and inhumane unilateral sanctions was a clear instance of such destructive practices. Such sanctions openly and indiscriminately targeted the daily life of ordinary citizens and were designed to undermine social development.

57. Despite the hardships imposed on it, his Government was determined to provide social protection for its citizens. Between 2007 and 2015 the proportion of the population with health-care coverage had increased from 68 to 91 per cent. The new national health plan, launched in 2014, provided a road map for achieving universal health care. The plan also facilitated the reduction of out-of-pocket payments, the creation of 916 new jobs in health care, the establishment of 374 new suburban health centres, improvements to training

programmes for hospital managers, upgrades to the emergency care facilities at 40 air ambulance sites, the launch of electronic health records and an increase in the budget allocation for the Ministry of Health. The private sector and civil society had been instrumental in achieving that progress, and Iran had also extended health-related assistance to countries in the region.

58. The United Nations system and development partners should scale up financial and technical assistance for low- and middle-income countries, as well as mobilizing additional resources for water and sanitation infrastructure.

59. **Ms. Yagkoubi** (Netherlands), speaking as a youth delegate, said that, as a Dutch girl raised in the Netherlands by her Moroccan parents, she had always been fascinated by diversity and identity. Research indicated that over the past year polarization and divisive sentiment had risen in her country among people of different ethnicities, those in different income groups and those with divergent political views. People derived their world view from their immediate surroundings, and when they lived only among others like themselves, it was natural that polarization would develop. Social media exacerbated the problem when algorithms ensured that users were exposed to more content similar to what they had already chosen to view. Someone who read an article written from an extreme standpoint, for instance, would repeatedly and increasingly be presented with reinforcing views, so that the ideas could become so deeply entrenched that an encounter with someone of a different persuasion would lead that person to react aggressively, out of fear.

60. However, social media could also provide a means to escape those same ideological bubbles; it offered platforms for activism and opportunities to raise social consciousness and foster global interconnectedness. It facilitated empathy and a sense of connection. So long as the human aspect of social media remained, polarization could be impeded. People must be aware of the complexity of one another's identities and avoid the reductive tendency to characterize others on the basis of a single feature. Most of all, people must talk to those who were different, whether culturally, socioeconomically, or perhaps most importantly, in view of the world's current predicament, those with different political opinions.

61. **Ms. Pauerová** (Slovakia), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the disconnect between young people and world leaders must be addressed if the Sustainable Development Goals were to be achieved. The Goals were represented visually in a circle, as a reminder of their interconnectedness. The wide-ranging work

needed to achieve them required trust between world leaders and young people, because collective action was imperative.

62. Inequalities among young people affected their futures; while she was fortunate enough to have the financial support needed to travel to and stay in New York, many capable young people were not. Equal opportunities, accessible quality education and decent work were included among the Sustainable Development Goals, and paid internships would be one step towards making those goals a reality.

63. **Mr. Sisa** (Botswana) said that Botswana had a number of policies and programmes aimed at eradicating extreme poverty, reducing inequality and promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development. The Government allocated more than 25 per cent of the total national budget to education and training, while its social assistance spending was equivalent to approximately 4 per cent of its GDP, both of which had helped to reduce national levels of poverty and extreme poverty in recent years. The Government was continuing to improve the education system, by introducing outcome-based education, enhancing access to early childhood education and aligning curricula with local and global trends. An inclusive education policy had resulted in an increase in the enrolment of learners with special educational needs from 1,718 in 2015 to 2,194 in 2018.

64. The Government provided supplementary food to primary school children at schools and to vulnerable groups at health-care facilities nationwide, which had both increased school attendance and reduced hunger and malnutrition among children under 5 years, pregnant women and tuberculosis patients. Through a programme introduced in 2010, the Government was helping orphans and other vulnerable children to gain access to tertiary education; as of February 2019, 9,475 young people had benefited. The Government had also taken measures to empower those living in rural and remote areas, including by establishing economic empowerment programmes and providing support for rural citizens to gain access to decent housing and employment. Lastly, the Government continued to assist its people in the face of climate change, in particular through the provision of food and agricultural subsidies to drought-stricken communities.

65. **Ms. Holboll** (Sweden), speaking as a youth delegate, said that development was not possible without civil society, and there could be no civil society without young people's active participation. However, democratic space for civil society was under attack. Legislation to restrict the rights to freedom of

association, assembly and expression was multiplying, and funding for civil society organizations was diminishing. The work of youth civil society organizations, social movements, young human rights defenders and activists was becoming increasingly difficult and dangerous, as hostile conditions prevented young people from acting as agents for change. Yet an open civil society with youth participation was one of the fundamental safeguards against tyranny and oppression.

66. The recent climate strikes and growing youth mobilization demonstrated young people's commitment to resolving some of the most vital issues of the time, a commitment that entitled them to be involved in decision-making at all levels. Their exclusion jeopardized the success of efforts to protect people and the planet. Governments must learn to treat young people as partners and initiators. Those most at risk of marginalization needed targeted measures to ensure that they were heard, and national Governments must provide enabling legal environments for civic action and protect the rights to freedom of association, expression, assembly and information, as well as ensure inclusive political participation. Regional and global institutions must uphold norms on civic space and strengthen Governments' accountability for protecting civic freedoms.

67. **Ms. Gumberidze** (Georgia), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals represented a commitment to inclusion. Greta Thunberg, the young climate activist, was on the autistic spectrum, and yet she had risen to global prominence, demonstrating the potential of persons with disabilities to make enormous contributions to humanity's common future.

68. In Georgia, steps were being taken to mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals. One such measure was that compliance with the Goals was now a criterion for the approval of new textbooks. Many middle-income countries were mired in or recovering from violent conflict and needed not only help, but also the chance to play a role in international processes.

69. In many countries, overlapping identities increased the likelihood of social exclusion. For example, her school friend, who was blind and female, had had no choice but to study at a public boarding school for the blind in Tbilisi, far from her native Abkhazia, which did not have such schools. As Abkhazia was currently occupied by the Russian Federation, the friend's family was not allowed to travel to visit her or to live with her, which meant that she would not be able to enrol in university upon graduation.

Not only must young ethnic Georgians contend with restrictions on their movement in the occupied territories, but their right to education in their native language was being violated, and many Abkhaz young people were concerned that their language would be lost.

70. **Ms. Velkov** (Serbia), speaking as a youth delegate, said that her country had presented its voluntary national review on the Sustainable Development Goals in 2019, demonstrating its commitment to the 2030 Agenda. The Republic of Serbia was proud of its Ministry of Youth and Sports and its legislative framework that specifically promoted young people's rights. Moreover, the city of Novi Sad currently held the title of European Youth Capital, which placed its young people and their positive energy in the spotlight for a full year.

71. **Mr. Karanovic** (Serbia), speaking as a youth delegate, said that every year, millions of young people entered the job market only to fall victim to the global youth unemployment crisis. The prevalence of unpaid internships and the weak link between education systems and labour markets contributed to the crisis. All stakeholders should act to protect the young labour force and ease the school-to-work transition. In Serbia, youth unemployment remained high, despite a fall in overall unemployment in recent years. Furthermore, despite its youth policies, his country faced the same problem as many others, a gap between policies and young people themselves that must be bridged. Governments needed to reach out to young people and provide high quality education, including citizenship education, to empower young people to take part in decision-making processes.

72. **Ms. Horbachova** (Ukraine) said that despite heavy security and defence expenses necessitated by foreign aggression, Ukraine was forging ahead to implement the 2030 Agenda in order to ensure sustainable economic growth, overcome poverty, increase employment, strengthen law enforcement, enact judicial reforms, promote innovation, invest in sustainable infrastructure and improve the education and health-care systems. The President had recently signed a decree to support the mainstreaming of the Sustainable Development Goals across all government policies and provide for the monitoring of progress.

73. **Ms. Mokhd** (Ukraine), speaking as a youth delegate, said that young people could play a crucial role in building a more peaceful world. Her father's experience as a refugee from the Taliban regime had inspired her to see the contribution that refugees could make, and the international community should ensure that migrants and refugees were given the opportunity to contribute.

74. In the heart of Europe, shots were still being heard in Ukraine as the Russian aggression continued. It had already claimed 13,000 lives and left 30,000 wounded, while forcing some 1.5 million people from their homes in the Donbas region and Crimea. No one with a sense of humanity could remain indifferent.

75. **Mr. Tkymotsko** (Ukraine), speaking as a youth delegate, said that young people had a vital part to play in shaping a prosperous future, but many young Ukrainians were sacrificing their life plans for their country's security. Ukraine had been fighting against external aggression for six years, and the international community must support it and its young people in the face of the gross human rights violations committed by Russia in Crimea and parts of the Donbas region.

76. **Ms. Quiel Murcia** (Panama) said that social development and the reduction of inequalities were priorities for her Government. In particular, it was investing in early childhood interventions with a view to inclusive development and breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty. Through a multidimensional anti-poverty programme called the Beehive Initiative, central government entities and local governments were working together to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable groups. The private sector also had a significant role to play in development: private companies should integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into their corporate strategies, so that their participation went beyond mere displays of corporate social responsibility.

77. With regard to the integrated nature of the Goals, Panama recognized that without quality education it would not be possible to break the vicious circle of poverty or change the status quo. The Government was therefore concentrating on education and training, and on ensuring better access to education for vulnerable groups such as women, young people, persons with disabilities, older adults, people of African descent and indigenous people. It had also created various youth forums, including a national youth network for the Sustainable Development Goals, to enable young people from all regions to participate in decision-making processes that would affect their economic and social well-being. The Government was also promoting policies to protect the interests of older adults and maintain their quality of life. Panama recognized that economic growth went hand in hand with social development, and that neither social nor economic development would be possible without mainstreaming gender in public policy, in order to ensure that key spaces were available for women to play their part in carrying development initiatives forward.

78. **Ms. Molay** (Ireland), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the current economic system was harming young people's mental health. In Ireland and around the world, children were raised believing that hard work would be rewarded and that they themselves were the future. Yet those dreams were being crushed as, around the world, more than one billion girls and young women did not have the skills needed to make their way in an increasingly digital world. Even those who were fortunate enough to have access to secondary and tertiary education often did not benefit from a system they had believed to be a meritocracy. Their social contributions, whether they acted as local community leaders or worked as interns without pay, were seen as "extracurricular activities" that had no value.

79. The current economic system did not allocate resources efficiently, but instead it created growing inequalities, destroyed the planet, wasted the potential of young people and kept them trapped in lives of constant scarcity. Young people wanted a fairer, greener world, but it was hard to stay confident about the future when the labour market failed to provide meaningful work, income security and a work-life balance. It was time to shift the focus away from economic growth and towards the pursuit of a good life for all. Societies must free themselves from the pressures of the 24/7 economy and concentrate on what mattered: people, the planet and communities.

80. **Mr. O'Connor** (Ireland), speaking as a youth delegate, said that communities in Ireland and around the world were suffering the serious impact of mental health issues. A suicide always had ripple effects in the community, touching the mental health of all. Figures from the World Health Organization indicated that someone committed suicide every 40 seconds, and a high proportion of those were young people between the ages of 10 and 29. However, despite the prevalence of mental health issues, young people continued to mask their struggles, largely because of to the stigma associated with mental health problems. When young people, who so often raised their voices in unison for other global issues, remained silent rather than speaking out about the fears and insecurities that were driving them to suicide, society had failed.

81. The United Nations should bolster efforts to eradicate both suicide and the stigmatization of mental health issues, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where 79 per cent of suicides occurred. Collaboration should be strengthened between organizations with a mental health mandate and grassroots initiatives, so that space and resources could be available for young people to express their innermost

thoughts, an opportunity that might not only improve their lives but perhaps save them.

82. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that the Sudan was going through deep political and social transformations, which were ushering in openness and the exercise of rights and freedoms. The new Constitution, signed in August 2019, stipulated that the new civil Government would provide social services in the form of health care, education, housing, environmental protection and support for biodiversity. The document also safeguarded women's rights, by prohibiting harmful practices and providing for free maternal and child health care.

83. The Government had been working to eradicate poverty and achieve full employment and decent work for all, focusing on the most vulnerable groups and areas affected by conflict, as well as working to address climate change and improve livelihoods. Its new social development action plan addressed a range of issues, including youth employment, literacy and education. The family was the building block of Sudanese society, and the Government had launched a project to support family stability, which included the provision of guidance to families and efforts to improve the status of women. The Government had also drawn up a strategy for decent work and economic empowerment aimed at the most vulnerable.

84. Government programmes were in place to support families caring for older adults, protect the rights of persons with disabilities and protect children, particularly those living in conflict-ridden zones, as well as to rehabilitate prisoners who had been released by armed groups and support their reintegration into society. It had adopted a "Women, Peace and Security" agenda, under which it offered a number of training programmes.

85. In the current period of transition and in its efforts to promote social development, the Sudan needed more intensive cooperation through effective partnerships with the international community. National capacity-building would be critical to enable her Government to address poverty, fund social programmes and boost local community engagement, while also meeting the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons. Lastly, she called for the country's debt to be cancelled.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.