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Chairman: Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq)
later: Mr. Ballesterro (Vice-Chairman) (Costa Rica)
later: Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq)

Contents

Agenda item 60: Social development (*continued*)

- (a) Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (*continued*)
- (b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*)
- (c) United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all (*continued*)
- (d) Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing (*continued*)

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

Agenda item 60: Social development (*continued*)

- (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/61/99)
- (b) **Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family** (*continued*)
- (c) **United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all** (*continued*) (A/61/151)
- (d) **Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing** (*continued*) (A/61/167)

1. **Mr. Gaisenak** (Belarus) said that over the past 10 years, his Government had been implementing an economic policy with a strong social emphasis. The key priorities were education, employment, health care and care for older persons, a practical demonstration of the Government's commitment to encouraging social equality while promoting economic growth. Belarus had an annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of over 10 per cent and its Gini index had been under 0.3 per cent for the past 10 years. The unemployment rate of under 1.5 per cent was the lowest in Eastern Europe and the Government was implementing comprehensive measures to enhance the position of professionals on the labour market and increase job opportunities for certain professions. National and regional programmes were in place to increase employment and retrain the unemployed for occupations that were in high demand on the labour market.

2. Education and literacy were key contributors to social and economic development. Education was a top priority for social and economic policy in Belarus, where spending on education accounted for around 6 per cent of GDP. Secondary education was free and higher education was available free to all on the basis of competition. Special emphasis was given to encouraging equal rights to education for rural and urban youth. For years, the education system had

achieved one of the highest adult literacy levels in the world, namely, 99.7 per cent.

3. Social policy in Belarus traditionally focused on guaranteeing adequate care for older persons, especially World War II veterans. Four national laws and five State programmes provided the legal framework for such protection. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's appeal for increased efforts to ensure social equality while promoting economic growth and believed that national and international measures aimed at eradicating poverty and cutting unemployment should also be strengthened. It confirmed its readiness to work for a strengthened United Nations capacity in the area of social development and hoped to become a member of the Economic and Social Council in January 2007.

4. **Ms. Hastaie** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the international community's efforts to bring about prosperity and well-being for all nations had been adversely affected by a number of trends, including socio-economic inequalities among nations and continents and policies that prevented the constructive integration of countries into the international system. Unilateral sanctions, interference in trade relations and actions such as invasion, occupation, threats and arbitrary use of force also limited the ability of countries to develop modern technologies and generate resources for social development.

5. Many developing countries continued to face high levels of structural unemployment, yet expansion of decent employment for all was a prerequisite for overcoming poverty. Her Government remained committed to achieving the goals of the World Summit for Social Development and United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to social development. It also sought to promote policies and develop institutions and programmes that balanced equity and social justice with a concern for economic growth and human development. A review of its progress in implementing the outcomes of the World Summit and the Millennium Development Goals showed that it was making significant efforts to meet the recommended targets by 2015, although the pace and quality of those efforts needed to be strengthened.

6. Noting the devastating impact of natural disasters on social and economic infrastructures, she stressed the importance of the cooperation and partnership of the international community in extending assistance to

national governments at all stages of preparedness, rapid response, recovery and reconstruction. The illicit cultivation and trafficking of narcotic drugs was another major threat to economic growth and sustainable development. As a transit country, Iran suffered greatly from the illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs. No single government could tackle the problems created by that phenomenon without the cooperation and active involvement of all countries concerned. Her delegation called on the international community to consider urgent action in that area.

7. **Ms. Backlund** (Finland), speaking as the youth representative of Finland, said that a record number of youth delegates had participated in the General Assembly's 2005 review of the World Programme of Action for Youth. Although that Programme was not on the agenda of the current session, it should not be forgotten that young people accounted for half the world's population and that they were ready to assume responsibility for their own future. They should be given opportunities to do so by being treated as equal partners. To that end, she urged the inclusion of more youth delegates in Member States' delegations.

8. She emphasized the crucial importance of the education of girls and young women for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Education gave young people the key to social advancement and control over their own lives and was essential for economic growth. She urged the United Nations to place the creation of jobs and educational opportunities for young people much higher on its list of priorities.

9. **Ms. Sund** (Norway), speaking as the youth representative of Norway, said that half the world's young people were living in poverty and almost a quarter in extreme poverty. Young people also accounted for nearly half of all new HIV infections in the world. The key to changing that situation was education. Universal primary education was the focus of the second Millennium Development Goal, but achieving that goal by 2015 was not enough: the education provided must be of good quality and relevant to children's everyday lives. A strong system of secondary and tertiary education was also essential to empower people to participate in society and promote development. Without education, people did not have the tools necessary for entering the many arenas of power at the national and international levels.

10. Three groups of young people were especially vulnerable in terms of education and influence: indigenous people, girls and children and youth in conflict zones. Education for indigenous people must be empowering and respectful of their culture. Girls — and women — should have equal access to education. Children in conflict zones were missing out on childhood and schooling. Education was an area where political decision-making at all levels should include youth participation. The United Nations was another. She urged all governments to focus on strengthening the entire education systems of developing countries to enable them to provide good-quality education that was relevant to everyday life, respectful of local culture and sensitive to the needs of marginalized groups. She urged the General Assembly to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, called on all governments to eliminate gender disparities at all levels of education by no later than 2015 and urged the international community to take responsibility for the education of children and youth in conflict zones by ensuring that education as a humanitarian response was adequately funded and coordinated and that a percentage of the funds raised through United Nations flash appeals for emergencies was earmarked for the education sector. Lastly, she urged governments to include youth representatives when issues related to youth were being debated and to send youth delegates to the General Assembly.

11. **Ms. Klein** (Australia), speaking as the youth representative of Australia, said that in the past year she had consulted with young people throughout Australia and listened to their views on issues that were important to them. She had found that education and empowerment were crucial to mobilizing and inspiring young people to take charge of their lives and reach their full potential. The meaning of education had evolved from conventional classroom studies to providing support to individuals that empowered them and gave them the confidence to take up challenges and achieve their dreams. She had witnessed an example of that broader focus in a rural community in Australia where, through a combination of education, peer support and activities aimed at raising self-esteem, young indigenous women had been empowered to overcome a culture of abuse and discrimination to pursue their dreams of finding jobs, finishing school and even attending university.

12. She had witnessed the importance of education not only in Australia but throughout the world. For instance, she had been involved in the development of a school for over 130 underprivileged young people in Bamako, Mali. Students at that school were equally motivated to take charge of their lives and break the cycle of poverty. She had also met a group of young men in prison in Australia who had talked about how education had increased their faith in community and improved their self-esteem.

13. Her generation needed to be educated so that it could tackle the challenges left it by the current generation. The most important issue for young people everywhere was that everyone should be equal and should be treated with respect. Young people were powerful, intelligent and wise and a creative resource that must be tapped at what was a critical time in world history. They should not be disregarded because of their perceived naïveté or lack of experience, for that could actually create the drive and enthusiasm needed to bring about change. She urged the international community to include young people in the decision-making process, to educate them and to allow them to grow so they too could make a difference.

14. **Ms. Hughes** (United States of America) said that her delegation welcomed the opportunity to highlight recent efforts to combat illiteracy. Literacy was critical to successful democracy, employment generation and the defeat of terrorism. Unfortunately, over 800 million people across the globe, including 771 million adults, were illiterate. More than two thirds of the illiterate adults were women, and 61 per cent of illiterate children were girls. In 2005, United States foreign assistance programmes in education had contributed over US\$ 492 million to basic education and educational activities in 43 developing countries. The African Education Initiative was a US\$ 600 million multi-year programme consisting of scholarships for girls, textbooks and teacher training opportunities. The Textbooks and Learning Materials Programme would provide 15 million textbooks and learning materials and help build capacity in Senegal, Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Ghana.

15. The United States and other G-8 and Broader Middle East and North African leaders were working to reduce illiteracy rates by half over the next decade. The Broader Middle East and North African Initiative would create a network to share best practices among nations in that region and to establish common

measurement standards for achieving literacy goals. Her Government funded literacy programmes for out-of-school youth and adults, particularly women and girls, in other countries in Asia and the Near East. Training for teachers and volunteers was also supported.

16. Since 2002, her Government had supported a teacher exchange programme for women teachers from Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Teacher Education Project enhanced the professional skills of women teachers and administrators by bringing them to the United States for university programmes lasting six to eight weeks. Nearly 100 women educators had already graduated from the programme.

17. In September 2006, First Lady Laura Bush had hosted the White House Conference on Global Literacy in her capacity as Honorary Ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade. Three panel discussions had been held on Mother/Child Literacy, Literacy for Health and Literacy for Economic Self-sufficiency. Mrs. Bush had announced that the American people would contribute US\$ 1 million for the implementation of the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which gathered data to determine why certain populations and subgroups had lower literacy rates than others. Her Government recognized that reporting education outcomes by population and subgroup helped to identify students whose needs were not being met and it aimed to support other countries to do the same. Her delegation was encouraged by the leadership provided by UNESCO in that critical area of social development.

18. **Ms. Al-Madhani** (United Arab Emirates) said that it was regrettable that more than 10 years after the World Summit for Social Development, over half the world's population continued to lack the basic requirements for living with dignity in a secure society and still faced poverty, disease, unemployment, illiteracy, organized crime and armed conflict. She commended the work of the United Nations in the area of social development but said that international efforts to implement the outcomes of the relevant conferences must be stepped up in order to fulfil pledges to improve social and humanitarian conditions for all.

19. Her country had made great progress in the area of social development, as demonstrated by its ranking among the countries having "high human development"

in the *Human Development Report 2005*. Per capita income had grown, government expenditure on education, health and social security had increased, elementary school enrolment rates were high for both boys and girls, illiteracy rates were decreasing and there was greater participation by women in the work force and in decision-making. Progress in the health sector included the eradication of polio and malaria and the low incidence of HIV/AIDS.

20. Her Government attached great importance to the development of human resources, particularly youth, disabled persons and the elderly, and provided free education at all levels to that end. The National Human Resource Authority for Development and Employment coordinated the requirements of development, the labour market and human resources, promoted graduate employment, especially in the all-important private sector, and encouraged the updating of school curricula to meet changing labour-market needs.

21. Her Government had recently issued a number of laws for the protection of human rights, particularly the rights of children, and in February 2006 the first "human rights civil society" had been launched to promote human rights, foster social, economic and political justice and provide education on the rights and obligations of the individual towards the State and vice-versa. The Government paid particular attention to young people especially those in difficulty, for whom special rehabilitation centres had been set up, staffed by specialized psychologists and social workers. Persons with other special needs were cared for in appropriate centres, and vocational training programmes for the disabled had been enhanced to facilitate their integration in society.

22. **Ms. Blum** (Colombia) noted the continuing validity of the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly and in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade. The Secretary-General's report in document A/61/99 emphasized the need to bear in mind the structural causes of poverty, such as unequal income distribution, vulnerability and insecurity, in formulating effective poverty-eradication strategies.

23. Since 2002, her Government had been implementing a plan embodying seven tools for equity, as a result of which education coverage had been

increased with the goal of achieving universal coverage by 2010, technical training had been provided to nearly 4 million Colombians and 300,000 university places had been created. It had extended its literacy programme by introducing a national literacy plan that was expected significantly to reduce the country's illiteracy rate, which was currently 8.6 per cent. Other education actions included the provision of food to students and subsidies to vulnerable families with children at school, many of whom had been displaced by violence. Health care had been extended, with the goal of achieving universal coverage by 2010. Subsidies were being provided to older persons living in extreme poverty and a comprehensive policy was being drawn up in that area. Policies to improve agricultural production and rural quality of life were also being implemented, including programmes for the substitution of illicit crops, which had a significant social and environmental impact.

24. Her Government had also introduced a policy of democratic security, as a result of which over 40,000 members of violent groups had been demobilized, crime and insecurity had been reduced and a more favourable environment for investment, economic growth and social development had been created. Strategies for equity, reduction of unemployment and increased security have enabled the poverty rate to be reduced from 60 per cent to 49 per cent. The goal was to reduce that rate to 35 per cent by 2010 and 15 per cent by 2019. A government-funded social protection network against extreme poverty was intended to reduce extreme poverty from 15 to 8 per cent over the next four years.

25. While primary responsibility for poverty eradication lay with individual States, the commitment, efforts and financial support of the international community were also essential in order to reach the Millennium Development Goals in the area of social development. The greatest possible coordination was required between international actors working in the field of social development and government, civil society and business, so that resources were allocated to a comprehensive strategy that was in keeping with countries' own plans for achieving the Millennium Goals. It was essential to increase the emphasis on social issues and develop relevant strategies backed by the United Nations system, in subregional and regional forums. It was also important that developing countries participate in decision-making by United Nations

organs and international financial institutions that affected social development. Lastly, the building of countries' institutional, normative and policymaking capacity in the area of social development needed support.

26. **Mr. Amoros Nuñez** (Cuba) noted that, despite all the promises made over the years, the world was far more unjust and unequal than it had been at the time of the World Summit for Social Development. Despite all the discussions on how to eradicate extreme poverty and the progress claimed in that regard, a sixth of the world's population continued to survive on less than one dollar a day and almost half on two dollars a day. There had been no progress in poverty eradication in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and West Asia, in other words, in most of the developing world. It was shameful that millions of people continued to starve, that millions of children continued to die from preventable causes and that millions of adults were illiterate.

27. The reason for that lack of progress was that powerful countries continued to perpetuate a world economic and political order — or disorder — that fostered inequality and led to chaos in a unipolar world for the benefit of a few nations. Those countries promoted the idea that the world's poor were a threat to peace and security and they allocated 10 times as much money to military expenditure as to official development assistance (ODA), which was far below the level pledged. Those countries continued to massively subsidize their own agricultural sectors, while fomenting inequality at home and abroad. Such rampant inequality could be eliminated only through solidarity and cooperation.

28. He recalled the socio-economic changes brought about in his country by the Cuban Revolution in its efforts to build a just society, despite all the risks and threats and the blockade imposed by the United States of America, which continued to be the main obstacle to more rapid social progress in Cuba. Through policies of equity and welfare, justice and dignity, economic development had been harmonized with social development and no worker had been left behind. The country's free health care and education system, high rates of school enrolment, high teacher-pupil ratios and situation of full employment bore witness to those efforts.

29. Genuine cooperation was vital for expanding social development. Accordingly, thousands of Cuban health care, sports and education workers were serving in some 110 developing nations. Cuba's scholarship programme had benefited hundreds of thousands of third world students, particularly medical students. The sight of thousands of foreign patients had been restored free of charge in Cuba and programmes providing advice on literacy training and secondary education had been implemented worldwide. It was necessary to fight for a more just and equitable world economic order and to establish true solidarity among peoples in order to turn words and dreams into reality.

30. **Ms. Naraghi** (Sweden), speaking as the youth representative of Sweden, said that while the United Nations system was sometimes perceived to be all about words, those words translated into important commitments, which in turn must be translated into action. The many examples of injustice, war, poverty and dictatorship in the world were often the result of countries' failure to respect common international agreements. For instance, despite article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, many people, including young people and youth organizations, did not have the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Despite the efforts of the international community, other people were still living under foreign occupation and thousands of young people were forced to live in refugee camps. Despite the commitments made in Cairo in 1994, many young women were still victims of unsafe abortions and female genital mutilation. It was unacceptable that such commitments were arbitrarily broken and everyone must strive to respect them and translate them into action.

31. Young people were particularly vulnerable in all countries, especially in societies experiencing conflict or oppression but also in those living in peace and welfare. The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond was therefore of great importance. For it to achieve results, cooperation, especially cooperation with youth in civil society, was essential. Young people must be seen not only as a target group but also as important players in their own right. Such cooperation could take the form of consultations with youth-led initiatives and democratic youth structures and the participation of young people's non-governmental organizations in implementing national and local youth policies. Youth participation at the United Nations should also be

increased, in line with the commitments made in General Assembly resolution 60/2 on policies and programmes involving youth. She urged all Member States to ensure that their delegations to the sixty-second session of the General Assembly included a youth delegate.

32. Youth policy should be twofold, involving the power to decide and the right to welfare. Young people had the same human rights as other human beings. They should be involved in the development of reliable indicators to measure the action taken to turn the World Programme of Action for Youth into reality. That was a matter of dignity, credibility and efficiency.

33. **Mr. Kallehauge** (Denmark) welcomed the upcoming adoption of the draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was an important milestone in the history of the disability movement. He praised the Government of Mexico as the driving force behind the Convention, the commitment of the many other participants from Governments, civil society and disabled people's organizations to reaching agreement on the text and the excellent work done by the Ambassador of New Zealand, in steering the negotiations. He expressed regret at the decision to attach a footnote to article 12 of the Convention saying that in Arabic, Chinese and Russian, the term "legal capacity" referred to "legal capacity for rights", rather than "legal capacity to act". Taken literally, having rights on the basis of which one could not act amounted to having no rights at all. The footnote was not only harmful but nullified the effects of the entire Convention in countries that accepted it. He therefore called for its deletion.

34. **Mr. Rudkjøbing** (Denmark), speaking as the youth representative of Denmark, said that real involvement of young people in developing and implementing policies that concerned them was the key to strong and sustainable development. Such involvement must be strengthened even further if the Millennium Development Goals were to be met. He commended the World Bank for choosing to focus on youth in its *World Development Report 2007*, as that would provide much-needed data about children and young people. He hoped that trend would continue. Young people could be agents for positive change in society, but adults' failure to recognize their capabilities needed to be overcome in order to ensure greater participation by young people in matters that concerned them. That would lead to better decisions

and should take place at all levels, local, national and international. He therefore looked forward to seeing more young people and youth representatives at General Assembly sessions in the years to come.

35. **Mr. Tin** (Myanmar) said that the international community was still far from achieving the goals and targets set at the World Summit for Social Development and during the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. While attaining social development goals was chiefly the responsibility of national Governments, developing countries needed the support of their development partners in that regard. An increase in ODA was therefore required. Many of the least developed countries (LDCs) were unable to allocate adequate resources to social development because of their debt-servicing obligations. Creditor countries and institutions should therefore take steps to resolve the debt crisis and reach the target of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) to official development assistance.

36. The promotion of equitable economic and social development was a national priority in Myanmar. The virtual end of the insurgency had enabled the Government to implement programmes aimed at narrowing the socio-economic development gap between rural and urban areas. Under one programme, substantial resources had been allocated to development in remote border areas and the provision of alternative livelihoods to opium farmers, which had led to a significant decline in opium production.

37. Another programme involved the establishment of 24 special development zones throughout the country, with special emphasis on education, health and infrastructure development. A third programme focused on integrated rural development and improving the livelihoods of rural people. The Government had also made efforts to boost agricultural production, food security and farmers' incomes through mechanization and major infrastructure projects.

38. Despite international efforts to promote literacy, millions of adults around the world still lacked basic literacy skills. In Myanmar, the Government had been implementing a long-term national plan for the promotion of education, under which many new schools had been opened, primary school enrolment had increased and the literacy rate had improved. The provision of non-formal education programmes had also helped to improve literacy.

39. HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis were considered diseases of national concern in Myanmar. A programme of action drawn up in conjunction with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS had led to a reduction in the HIV/AIDS infection rate. Programmes of immunization against measles had led to an increase in the number of children immunized and further efforts to achieve total coverage would soon be under way, in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Significant progress had also been made towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the areas of health, education, access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation.

40. The issue of ageing was not a serious problem in Myanmar, as the proportion of older people in the population was relatively small and the elderly were traditionally cared for within the family. Nonetheless, efforts to address the issue of ageing in line with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing would be continued.

41. **Ms. Enkhtsetseg** (Mongolia) expressed concern at the slow and uneven progress in implementing international commitments on global poverty reduction. In many countries, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals was being hampered by capacity constraints and the support of the international community was therefore needed.

42. Mongolia had produced its first national report on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in 2004. The national goals had since been mainstreamed into the guidelines for the country's economic and social development and appropriate funds had been allocated from the State budget. The Government was also elaborating a comprehensive development strategy based on the Millennium Development Goals. The latest national statistics indicated that the country was on track to achieve most of the goals on schedule. However, poverty levels remained high and needed to be tackled more aggressively.

43. Her Government had taken the innovative step of adopting an additional goal on promoting human rights, fostering democratic governance and combating corruption. In that context, the Parliament had recently passed a new law against corruption, a phenomenon

which significantly impeded development. In addition, a new anti-corruption body was to be set up.

44. Under Millennium Development Goal 8, on developing a global partnership for development, her Government was working on issues relating to landlocked countries and was implementing a pilot project with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the role of trade and transportation in achieving human development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. It spent significant resources on transport costs related to imports and exports which could be put to other, better use. She called for the full and timely implementation of the declaration recently adopted at the first-ever Summit of Landlocked Developing Countries.

45. Inadequate implementation of development objectives was closely linked with shortage of resources. Despite the increase in ODA in recent years, the 0.7 per cent of GNP target was still far from being achieved. Political will was needed to close the gap between commitments made and action taken. Efforts were also needed to ensure that developing countries enjoyed the fruits of globalization.

46. Lastly, national and international efforts to achieve the expected outcomes of the United Nations Literacy Decade should be intensified. Literacy was recognized as one of the most powerful tools for poverty reduction, yet nearly 800 million adults worldwide lacked basic literacy skills. In that regard, Mongolia had offered to host an Asia-Pacific regional midterm review of the Decade, in cooperation with UNESCO and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Her delegation intended to submit an updated resolution on the Decade and would welcome the input of other delegations.

47. **Mr. Nguyen Tat Thanh** (Viet Nam) welcomed the recent finalization of the draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It was the shared responsibility of Member States to work towards its early entry into force. Much remained to be done, however, to protect persons with disabilities from poverty. It was imperative that, at the national and international levels alike, the costs and benefits of economic development should be distributed in accordance with the principles of social equity and justice. Similarly, the commitment made by developed countries to allocate 0.7 per cent of GNP to ODA

should be honoured and ways found of alleviating the developing countries' debt burden.

48. His Government was maintaining steady progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, while making every effort to harmonize economic growth with social equity and justice. That was reflected in its promotion of universal primary education, the implementation of microcredit schemes for women in rural areas, socioeconomic development programmes for rural, mountainous and remote areas, employment funds, particularly for persons with disabilities, and literacy programmes for ethnic minorities. By 2010, the level of spending on education was expected to reach 20 per cent of the State budget. Currently, the focus was on action to improve the situation in poor and remote areas through innovative approaches such as the provision of non-formal education at community level in cooperation with UNESCO.

49. **Mr. Al-Shemli** (Oman) said that the eradication of illiteracy was essential to achieving comprehensive development. Under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, Oman had made great strides in traditional literacy, which focused on basic reading and writing, functional literacy, which focused on vocational needs, and comprehensive literacy, which addressed the social dimension of the issue. The National Plan to Guarantee Education for All by 2015 included a plan to reduce illiteracy rates. The Ministry of Education had opened centres for adult education and literacy in all regions. The Government had made use of innovative techniques based on regional and international experience in implementing its programmes, such as the Ministry of Education programmes for family education for women and for broadcasting literacy courses on television. In implementation of the resolutions of the World Education Forum, held in Dakar in 2000, the Ministry had made efforts to provide educational opportunities to all segments of society, including literacy programmes for blind and deaf adults, parallel education for older students in special situations and the innovative "learning village" initiative. Many of those programmes had been incorporated in its seventh Five-Year Development Plan (2006-2010). The country also had cooperation and exchange programmes with other States and with international and regional organizations such as UNESCO and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(ISESCO). With each passing year, more citizens, students and adults were being liberated from the darkness of illiteracy, creating a human base for comprehensive development.

50. **Mr. Munz** (Germany), speaking as a youth representative of Germany, recalled that young people had played a major role in the reunification of Germany 16 years previously. However, many obstacles prevented young people around the world from developing their potential and contributing to their societies. Millions of young people had never enjoyed the benefits of education and lacked basic literacy skills, a situation which condemned them to a future of unemployment, poverty and marginalization. Many States were failing to address that problem.

51. Marginalized young people and their interests were barely represented in political processes, even those directly affecting them. That situation could not be allowed to continue. He called on the international community to ensure that all young people had access to education, which was the key to decent work and a life lived in dignity. Every dollar invested in education represented a better contribution to national and international peace and security than any dollar invested in weapons.

52. **Ms. Apel** (Germany), speaking as a youth representative of Germany, said that young people on the margins of society or with inadequate education were unable to contribute their potential to the cause of development. In 1995, the international community had adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, but its implementation had been far from adequate. Young people's situations varied, but their main concerns were the same the world over: fulfilment of their basic needs, access to a good education, access to decent and productive work and the opportunity to live in dignity and peace.

53. On behalf of young people everywhere, she called for better implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth and for full and effective youth participation at all levels. She also drew attention to the new priority areas of the Programme of Action for the coming year. The best way to ensure that young people's voices were heard in the international arena was to send youth delegates from each Member State to United Nations meetings.

54. Young people called for the immediate implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

They were ready to take on responsibilities in their societies and wanted to be given opportunities to help tackle worldwide problems.

55. **Mr. Limon** (Suriname) said that it was regrettable that the implementation of the commitments entered into at the World Summit for Social Development had fallen short of expectations. In order to eradicate poverty, international cooperation should be stepped up to create an enabling environment, including access for developing countries to international economic opportunities. In its development plan for 2006-2011, his Government had restated its commitment to eradicating poverty, providing social protection and ensuring access to quality education, health care and housing. Optimum use of natural and human resources was also critical to the achievement of those aims.

56. The creation of productive employment was a central part of poverty-alleviation efforts. His Government was placing particular emphasis on the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. At the same time, cooperation among the Government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations was crucial for broad and inclusive development. Despite the budgetary constraints it faced, the Government was committed to allocating resources to social development. However, national development efforts should be matched by efforts on the part of developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for official development assistance.

57. The past decade had been characterized by unfulfilled promises. The international community had a duty to address inequalities and ensure that impoverished and disadvantaged groups enjoyed the benefits of social and economic development and advances in science and technology. His Government stood ready to contribute to those efforts.

58. **Mr. Jafari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that efforts to fulfil commitments relating to social development continued to be affected by such obstacles and challenges as the ever-growing gap between advanced and developing countries, the adverse repercussions of globalization, increasing poverty and the imposition of various economic sanctions. Without a genuine display of international will, the goals of the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly would be difficult to achieve, as would the Millennium

Development Goals. His Government attached the utmost importance to the achievement of those goals, for social development was a fundamental human right, a basis for progress and a guarantee of a decent life free of poverty, disease and ignorance. Measures to tackle the root causes of poverty were thus essential, in which context his Government had successfully introduced a series of national development strategies and plans. It had also welcomed the United Nations Literacy Decade and its International Plan of Action, having itself devoted particular attention at the national level to the problem of illiteracy, which should be a priority of development programmes in that it constituted a fundamental obstacle to economic, social and cultural progress. Through his Government's efforts, the extent of the problem in the Syrian Arab Republic had diminished, particularly in rural areas and among women. In fact, the country now had the lowest illiteracy rates in the region.

59. His Government had enacted legislation to safeguard the rights of older persons and had also elaborated a national plan designed to improve health and social care for the ageing. Human development was the core focus of the country's latest five-year development plan, which was fully in line with current economic and social trends. Under the plan, a new system for monitoring and evaluating outcomes was to be elaborated with a view to ensuring the effective implementation of development programmes, projects, goals and strategies, as well as greater competitiveness, higher economic growth rates and better management of resources. On that score, however, the ongoing Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan was a matter of concern, continuing as it had for decades to deplete the country's human and material resources. For that same reason, overall conditions in the occupied Arab territories were worsening and talk of achieving social development under such circumstances was consequently far-fetched. Over the past few years, developments in the international arena had merely emphasized the need for increased cooperation aimed at solutions for the achievement of human development in each and every country worldwide.

60. **Ms. Rebello** (India) said that the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development contrasted sharply with the measures actually taken to implement them. In the past decade, poverty had increased in 18 countries, of which 14 were in Africa, mainly sub-Saharan Africa. As high growth did not

automatically lead to greater equality and social justice, direct anti-poverty programmes were necessary. Moreover, in the absence of a significant flow of resources and the increased application of science and technology in developing countries, the first Millennium Development Goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015 could not be achieved. While private investment was important, the requisite physical and social infrastructure must be developed first.

61. The measures taken by his Government to help eradicate extreme poverty worldwide included providing highly concessional credit lines to West Africa, substantial support to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), debt cancellation for Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), duty-free access to the Indian market for exports from the least developed countries and technical cooperation and capacity-building.

62. In India itself, the poverty ratio had fallen from 45 to 26 per cent over the past two decades as a result of numerous governmental initiatives, including the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme and a number of housing, health and food schemes. Those initiatives were expected to reduce the poverty rate by a further 5 per cent by 2007 and an additional 15 per cent by 2012. The Government had also paid close attention to two other core issues identified at the Copenhagen Summit, namely, promoting full and productive employment and fostering social integration. Since education was fundamental for development, it remained committed to achieving the targets set for the United Nations Literacy Decade. Literacy rates in India had risen from 18 per cent in 1951 to around 69 per cent currently, elementary education was recognized as a fundamental right and public spending on education was to be increased. The Government had taken a number of measures to ensure the welfare of older persons, including establishing a National Council for Older People, and was committed to working with the international community to implement the Madrid International Plan of Action. His delegation looked forward to the adoption by the General Assembly of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

63. Useful lessons learned from the Indian experience were that liberalization of the economy might need to be preceded by economic and scientific capacity-building; that the role of the State was as important as that of the market; that education was the basis for the

rapid development of science and technology; and, lastly, that the role of democratic governance was crucial.

64. *Mr. Ballestero (Costa Rica), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

65. **Mr. Al Bayati** (Iraq) said that human rights had been at the heart of the United Nations mission since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration on Social Progress and Development had listed national independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of States and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States as conditions for progress and social development and article 11 had provided for comprehensive social security schemes and social welfare to ensure a proper standard of living. The Iraqi Constitution provided for preservation of the family, protection of motherhood, childhood and old age and guarantees of social and health security in cases of old age, sickness, employment disability, homelessness, orphanhood or unemployment and guaranteed the individual and the family the basic requirements for leading a free and dignified life.

66. The support of the United Nations and the World Bank over the past five years in making Iraq a unified federal democratic country had gone a long way towards helping Iraq achieve sustainability, self-sufficiency, growth and integration into the region and the world. His Government subscribed to the principles of the International Bill of Human Rights and believed that social development would restore to the lives of Iraqi citizens the balance that had been upset by wars and economic sanctions. It would do its utmost to usher in a new era in Iraq characterized by a higher standard of living, employment opportunities, decreased poverty, rural development, improved transport and communications, schools, health care and social guarantees, with a focus on strengthening the family. It still needed support from the international community for its efforts to improve its economy and the lives of its citizens.

67. **Ms. Berlanga** (Mexico) said that poverty eradication was a prerequisite for achieving development. She accordingly endorsed the view expressed in document A/61/99 that the roots and structural causes of poverty must be addressed, that a comprehensive approach was required to respond to the multidimensional nature of poverty, incorporating

measures to promote equity, and that a policy of productive employment and decent work must be pursued. Efforts to help developing countries achieve their social development goals, inter alia, by cancelling their external debt burden, also needed to be redoubled. Her Government recognized the need for measures to ensure that all groups, including the most vulnerable, benefited from development and therefore welcomed the recent finalization of the draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She urged the international community to take the necessary measures for its early adoption and entry into force, since it represented a milestone for such persons and should guarantee full respect for their human rights and equal opportunities for their participation in society.

68. Her Government was also committed to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, whose provisions needed to be incorporated into national development plans. It recognized that the family was the basic unit of society and must therefore be strengthened, inter alia through enhanced development opportunities. Lastly, her delegation considered that the Literacy Monitoring Project should be followed up through the adoption of the necessary policy measures.

69. *Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) resumed the Chair.*

70. **Mr. Chernenko** (Russian Federation) reaffirmed his Government's commitment to the social development goals set out in various international declarations and documents over the past decade. The Russian Federation was standing for re-election to the Commission for Social Development and would do its utmost to ensure that the Commission remained the major coordinating body within the United Nations system on the issues of ageing, equal opportunities for persons with disabilities, strengthening the role of the family and improving the situation of young people.

71. Effective social policy was a key component of economic reform efforts in the Russian Federation. Steps were being taken to raise the standard of living through the provision of quality health care and education, access to housing and effective agriculture. Increased resources would be allocated to those areas in the 2007 national budget. The number of people living in poverty had fallen since 2005 and targets had been set for further poverty reduction.

72. Endorsing the proposed new priority areas for the World Programme of Action for Youth, he said that the draft Russian national strategy for youth policy was

based on similar priorities. The main aims of the strategy were to improve the situation of young people and enable them to make a greater contribution to national development.

73. Special policies were in place in the Russian Federation for the protection of motherhood, childhood and the family. A project had been introduced in early 2006 to allocate additional resources to medical care for women during pregnancy and childbirth. Steps were also being taken to increase the birth rate, improve the upbringing of children, increase the prestige attached to motherhood and fatherhood and provide reproductive health care.

74. In the context of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, his Government had introduced a new federal programme on social support for persons with disabilities. It also looked forward to the adoption by the General Assembly of the draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

75. His Government was making efforts to address the situation of older people in its social and economic strategies, on the basis of the declaration adopted at the World Assembly on Ageing and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. It was also working on a framework for demographic development up to the year 2015 that took account of issues related to ageing. Almost 40 million Russians were pensioners. Reform of the pension system was therefore of crucial importance. Real growth in pension payments was set to exceed the rate of inflation by 7 per cent in 2007. The replacement of in-kind benefits with monetary benefits and the introduction of a range of social services had also improved the economic and social situation of many older people.

76. His delegation supported the consolidation of United Nations activities in the social sphere and welcomed the concept of an indissociable link between social development, security and human rights.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.