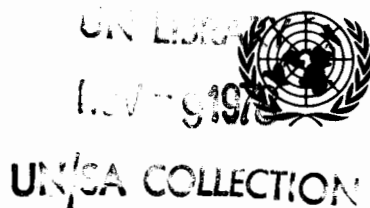


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THIRD COMMITTEE
34th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 1 November 1978
at 10.30 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 34th MEETING

Chairman: Mrs. SHAHANI (Philippines)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 78: NATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN ACHIEVING FAR-REACHING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES FOR THE PURPOSE OF SOCIAL PROGRESS (continued) (A/33/272; E/1978/19 and Add.1, E/1978/15 and Corr.1; A/C.3/33/L.3)

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AGENDA ITEM 91: UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON ADOPTION LAW (continued) (A/33/158)

1. Mr. LAURENT (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization) said that document E/1978/15 mentioned a number of FAO activities in support of agricultural producers and workers organizations, including co-operatives. Those activities reflected the growing awareness of the complex nature of the food problem, which could only be overcome by providing systematic assistance to the impoverished rural masses and fostering their participation in the efforts to improve their lot.

2. A number of important international meetings had been held beginning in 1963 to deal with those concerns and preparations were now being made for the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, the objectives of which were closely related to agenda items 78 and 80. The FAO Council had agreed in principle to convene the Conference as early as 1974 and the FAO Conference, at its nineteenth session, had decided to hold it in Rome from 12 to 20 July 1979. The Economic and Social Council had recently supported that initiative in its resolution 1978/44.

3. In response to the invitation of the Director-General of FAO, many Governments had submitted country reports analysing their experience in agrarian reform and indicating their future plans. On that basis, the Conference would discuss different strategies and general guidelines for preparing programmes to promote agrarian reform and increase investment in rural areas. It would have to examine the nature, dimensions and urgency of the problem of poverty in the rural areas on the basis of those country reports, FAO's contributions, the recommendations of the delegates of Member States who had taken part in FAO's Regional Conferences during 1978 and the many country studies and papers prepared by United Nations bodies. The Conference would also discuss the question of the integration of women in rural areas in the development process. The conclusions it reached could be taken into account at the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women.

4. The Director-General of FAO had extended invitations to some Member States of the United Nations which were not yet participating in FAO activities so that the World Conference could benefit from their important experience.

5. A high-level advisory committee and an interagency committee had already done preparatory work for the Conference, and a meeting was scheduled for March 1979 of

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(Mr. Laurent, FAO)

a preparatory committee which would discuss the basic document dealing with agrarian reform and rural development policies and developments in that sphere since the mid-1960s, and would recommend the final provisional agenda of the Conference.

6. FAO was confident that the Third Committee would foster the preparation of country programmes to be implemented by Governments in order to achieve their targets for agrarian reform and rural development. Thus, the World Conference could complement the work of other international meetings which had been drawing attention to the limitations of economic and social progress since 1972, and could furnish the elements of a strategy for the third United Nations Development Decade in line with the requirements of the new international economic order.

7. Mr. CANTAVE (Haiti), referring to item 91, said that from ancient times, people had given special attention to the problem of the child, and there had even been times when States had assumed direct responsibility for the support and education of children.

8. Social inequalities and the havoc wrought by colonialism in three quarters of the world had shattered the old family structure based on the tribe. As a result, it frequently happened that children whose parents disappeared were left in poverty if they were not lucky enough to be taken in by a generous family or a charitable institution.

9. In order to regulate relations between the child and the family or institution which took it in, the State had enacted legislation on adoption in the interest of all the parties. His delegation was glad that the Committee was finally discussing the item relating to a United Nations Conference for an international convention on adoption law, which had been on the agenda of the General Assembly since the twenty-ninth session. The item should be given top priority, bearing in mind that since the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1959, there had been general agreement on clear-cut principles relating to the protection of children. Consequently, and without underestimating the complexity of the problem and the divergencies in adoption laws for cultural and historical reasons, it was inconceivable that agreement should not be reached in the Third Committee on the convening of that Conference.

10. Everyone acknowledged the need to protect children, as was clear from the fact that the General Assembly had proclaimed 1979 as the International Year of the Child. It had already been decided to devote special attention to disadvantaged children and particularly young girls, who were not treated in the same way as boys, to slum children, orphans, children of unmarried mothers, poor children, handicapped children and children exposed to drugs and crime.

11. Haiti's legislation since 1966 contained regulations governing adoption; it had no objection to the convening of a conference on the subject and hoped that, since the conference was only a preliminary step towards the drafting of a convention, that it would attract the participation of all Member States.

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12. Mr. VOICU (Romania) said that his delegation attributed special importance to the group of items before the Committee. The Secretary-General's interesting report on item 78 (E/1978/19 and Add.1) provided an understanding of the main trends and the major objectives of economic and social development. Nevertheless, too much of it had been taken up with quantitative and statistical material to the detriment of an analysis of the qualitative factors. It was to be hoped that there would be improvements in future studies on the subject as regarded the general conception and the description of the economic and social trends in each country.

13. The policies and strategies applied by Romania in its process of economic and social progress had taken account of its historical, economic, social and national conditions and its status of developing country and the general laws of economic and social development had been applied creatively. Primary importance had been given to mobilizing the human and material resources required for development. Romania had allocated a substantial portion of the national income to increasing production as a basis for increasing national wealth and, consequently, the resources available for individual and social consumption. For example, in the five-year economic development plan for the period 1976-1980, approximately 33 or 34 per cent of the national income was allocated for inventories.

14. Romania had set a high rate of economic development as its goal, together with the harmonious development of all branches of the economy, continued industrialization, a balanced distribution of the forces of production throughout the country and the strengthening of the role of the central economic and social development plan. At the same time, it had managed to increase productivity and the efficiency of social welfare programmes and to promote the advancement of science and the expansion of education. Thus, it had been able to achieve a steady increase in its national income and assure the full participation of the entire population in the economic, social and cultural life of the country.

15. The value of Romania's experience was confirmed at the international level. In the study entitled "The future of the world economy" prepared for the United Nations by the celebrated economist, Wassily Leontief, it was pointed out that growth rates of 9 or 10 per cent were only possible if rates of investment were as high as 35 or 40 per cent, higher than the minimum figure of 20 per cent recommended in the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Decade for Development.

16. During the current five-year period Romania's savings figure of 32 to 34 per cent would be accompanied by an average increase of over 30 per cent in the real remuneration of agricultural and industrial workers. In addition to their direct income, the population would benefit from the funds allocated by the State for pensions and social insurance, measures for youth, the development of public services, and social and cultural programmes. The improvement of well-being for the entire people and the system of values on which the development process was based contributed to strengthening the principle of distribution according to labour actually performed. The Romanian economy would continue its rapid expansion because much remained to be done to attain a level of economic development compatible with the requirements of contemporary technological progress.

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(Mr. Voicu, Romania)

17. With regard to agenda item 80, his delegation emphasized that, as document E/1978/29 stated, equitable distribution of national income was an important factor in economic and social development. The analysis made in that report, however, did not provide an entirely satisfactory response to the concerns expressed by Member States. The fault did not lie with the Secretariat but was attributable to weaknesses in the data on the subject. What was clear was that, as the Secretary-General pointed out, current patterns of income distribution did not as yet meet the goals of greater equity of most countries.

18. The problem of equitable distribution of income could not be divorced from the creation and increase of national income. The paramount aim of Romania's economic and social policy was to increase the material and spiritual well-being of all the people, to satisfy the needs of workers and fully to develop the human personality. His country had succeeded in distributing national income in such a way as to modernize the technical and material base of society and consequently to raise the level of living of the population. In remuneration for labour, a fair ratio had been maintained between minimum and maximum wages and at the same time differences between high incomes and the more modest incomes had been reduced without pursuing egalitarianism to the point at which there was no incentive for productive effort. Over-all, Romania's experience was indicative of its concern to secure the highest increase possible in the incomes of those who worked directly in the productive sectors. The practical measures adopted were aimed at establishing a proper correlation between direct income and social consumption funds. It was hoped to achieve by the end of 1980 a rise in the real remuneration of workers of over 30 per cent, instead of the 20 per cent originally planned. At the same time, over 1 million new jobs had been created in the previous five years.

19. His delegation believed that inequality and injustice prevailed in the existing international division of labour, as was evidenced by the economic disparities among States. The establishment of the new international economic order presupposed faster development in the poorer countries and increased co-operation among States and it required that international relations should be based on equal rights, equity and respect for the right of every people to own its own national wealth and promote its own economic and social development without external interference.

20. On the subject of agenda item 87, he said that his delegation supported the designation of an international year for the elderly and the aged and the convening of a world conference on that subject, but it believed that the opinions of all Member States should be taken into account and that suitable preparations should be made.

21. On the subject of item 91, his delegation supported the convening of a United Nations conference for an international convention on adoption law; that would make it possible to consider adoption problems in all countries and to devise solutions which were acceptable under national legislation and accordingly likely to lead to general agreement. His delegation could agree to the idea of convening a group of experts, but the serious reservations expressed by some States on the prospects of achieving legislative uniformity at the international level with regard to adoption would have to be borne in mind.

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22. Mrs. LYKOVA (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the debate on the item on national experience in achieving economic and social changes for the purpose of social progress had always been of interest to all countries, regardless of their levels of development, and she understood why some should believe that changes in the social sector were a means of accelerating progress in the economic sector and of increasing the well-being of the population.

23. In accordance with the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, all States were responsible for ensuring the well-being of their peoples. Specific reference was made in the Declaration to the principle of the permanent sovereignty of each nation over its natural wealth and resources and to the right and responsibility of each State to determine freely its own objectives of social development without any external interference. The experience of many countries demonstrated their need to attain economic independence, but that independence could be attained only through the development of agriculture and industry, national control of resources and the active participation of the population in change.

24. A great many countries were striving to eliminate the consequences of their colonial past and to consolidate their independence. The Soviet Union understood their aspirations since it, too, had had a difficult past. It would shortly be celebrating the sixty-first anniversary of the October Revolution, which had ended the exploitation of man by man. In those 60 years the Soviet Union had been transformed into a socialist Power whose share of world industrial production was 25 per cent, after having been only 1 per cent in 1922. Much of that period had been devoted to struggling against imperialist and Fascist forces and to industrializing the country. In that industrialization process the co-operative movement had played a paramount role. In recent decades, under the five-year plans, enormous sums had been invested throughout the economy; it should be remembered in that connexion that under the socialist system resources could be channelled to the sectors in which they were most needed. Agriculture had been industrialized and at the moment an effort was being made to create industrial complexes in Siberia and the east of the country.

25. Hundreds of thousands of persons participated in the timely implementation of the five-year plans, since the object of all policy was to raise the material and cultural level of the population. It was sufficient to point out that in the previous 10 years alone, the housing conditions of millions of people had improved and that rents, which had not changed since 1938, amounted to only 2 to 3 per cent of family income.

26. As Mr. Brezhnev, Chairman of the Praesidium, had said, the most important social task was to care for the health of the population, and efforts were being made to improve the quality of medical services, which were free. One of every three doctors in the world was working in a Soviet medical institution. Similarly, in a country in which prior to the October Revolution most of the population had been illiterate, secondary education was universal. The Soviet social insurance system, which took care of the aged and the ill, was familiar to everyone.

27. In the socialist countries income was distributed among population groups in a more equitable manner. Prices were stable, and they fell as the supply of a given

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(Mrs. Lykova, USSR)

product increased. The socialist system was immune from crisis and periods of inflation; nevertheless, not all problems had been solved and current efforts were directed to introducing automation into industry and to using energy resources rationally and economically.

28. Many developing countries had introduced important changes by applying such measures as the nationalization of enterprises and agrarian reform and by establishing State control of the key sectors of the economy. The scope and nature of those changes obviously varied from one country to the next, but it should be borne in mind that, regardless of differences among countries, the world economy had reached a stage at which it was impossible for any of them to remain isolated behind its own frontiers. Accordingly, it was impossible to over-emphasize the importance of co-operation for mutual benefit, including co-operation between States having different economic and social systems.

29. The reduction in international tension had made it possible for such co-operation to begin. It would be remembered that the Soviet Union followed the practice of arranging information exchanges in a variety of fields with such countries as France, Finland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and Austria and also with developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The Soviet Union also had wide experience of co-operation within the framework of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, a form of co-operation in which the independence of national economies was fully respected.

30. She thought it would be useful for the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission for Social Development to take up from time to time the item on national experience in achieving far-reaching social and economic changes. She recalled that General Assembly resolutions 3273 (XXIX) and 31/38 had provided guidelines for holding regular interregional and regional seminars to study national experience in that regard. She did not understand why the Secretariat had not complied with those guidelines; steps must obviously be taken to rectify that situation. Finally, she hoped that the present discussion in the Committee and the measures to be taken would contribute to United Nations activities in the social field.

31. Miss DUBRA (Uruguay), referring to agenda item 87, said that she supported the proposal to convene a world assembly on aging, since that would make possible an exchange of experience on problems of the elderly and the aged as well as the formulation of programmes for dealing with those problems. She also endorsed the suggestion for observing an international year on aging in order to draw the attention of world public opinion to the serious problems affecting an increasingly large part of the world's population.

32. The problems of the elderly and the aged were particularly acute in industrialized societies; however, they had begun to make themselves felt in the developing countries as well, and those countries should therefore also consider what measures could be taken for the purpose of integrating that group of people into society. Her Government, for its part, supported any initiative designed to facilitate an exchange of experience and the formulation of programmes for

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(Miss Dubra, Uruguay)

alleviating the problems of the elderly, protecting them through social security measures, promoting research on their physical, demographic and sociological problems, protecting their human rights, and helping them to remain physically and intellectually active.

33. She was pleased to note that a great majority of States were in favour of observing an international year and convening a world assembly. She agreed with the Secretary-General that it was essential to make suitable preparations for those events, and she therefore thought it advisable to organize a secretariat for the international year which would undertake the preparatory work in co-operation with the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

34. With regard to agenda item 91, her Government supported the idea of holding a United Nations conference for an international convention on adoption law; although she recognized that it would be difficult to achieve standardization because of the differences in national legal systems, that should not present an insurmountable obstacle since the convention would contain general principles.

35. Mr. BAROODY (Saudi Arabia), referring to the impact that social change had had on the family and, in particular, to the manner in which what was called progress had affected the elderly, noted that the family was an institution that had been sanctified by all religions and exalted by all ideologies. For example, communism, which did not accept any traditional religion, respected the family because there was a virtually universal recognition of the fact that the family was the corner-stone of every society. However, industrialization and progress had disturbed all those traditions, and family cohesion was threatened at the present time. Families were being separated or were breaking up, and those who suffered most as a result were the elderly. It was his opinion that a very high price had been paid for progress.

36. The extended family had once existed in the Mediterranean area, and it apparently was still to be found in some Asian and African societies. In the industrialized world, however, young people left home as soon as they were able to earn their livelihood, leaving behind the elderly members of their families. In the Islamic world, it was traditional for children or, if they were not present, grandchildren to assume responsibility for the elderly. However, industrialization was making its appearance there, too, and the effects on the situation of elderly people could easily be foreseen.

37. He was surprised to hear increasing mention of human rights, which, in his opinion, were based on humanitarian feelings; the reason he found that surprising was that it was not possible to speak of humanitarian feelings when elderly people were being left to their fate. Homes for the elderly were increasing in number, and there was much talk of social security systems; thus, by various means, a situation was being created in which elderly people did not have to worry about their material needs, but there was a tendency to forget that man did not live by bread alone and that as a person approached the end of his life, just as at the beginning of life, what he most needed was affection and human warmth.

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(Mr. Baroody, Saudi Arabia)

38. For all those reasons, he thought it most appropriate to observe an international year on aging so that the real needs of that segment of the population would not be forgotten. In that connexion, he did not understand why some Governments had expressed so little enthusiasm for the proposed international year. He felt it was essential to try to preserve certain traditions, since, if they were lost, progress might prove to be counterproductive. Material things were not everything.

39. Mr. HEINEMANN (Netherlands), referring to item 87, said that, because of the drop in birth and death rates and the general improvement in health conditions, life expectancy was on the increase in nearly every part of the world, so that there was a need for policies and programmes that took the changing structure of population fully into account.

40. However, a truly world-wide problem of the aged could not be said to exist; the problem varied both qualitatively and quantitatively from country to country, with a particularly wide divergence between the developed and the developing countries. For that reason, an international year on aging would not serve a real purpose at the present stage, and regional and subregional consultations, studies and exchanges of information seemed more appropriate. For the same reason, he questioned the advisability of convening a world assembly on aging; it would be preferable to take up the problems of aging within the framework of a second World Population Conference and, in connexion with the review and appraisal of the 1974 World Population Plan of Action, to conduct research into the problems of aging and try to develop new policies.

41. Returning to the subject of an international year, he noted that in its decision 1978/47 the Economic and Social Council had requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on international years, and it was to be hoped that the Secretariat would include in that report a study on the costs of previous international years and on the substantive results achieved at the international and national levels so that it would be possible to develop more concrete criteria for the proclamation and organization of international years.

42. Mr. MARTYNOV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that his delegation welcomed the inclusion in the agenda, pursuant to resolution 31/38, of items 78 and 80, which were particularly important at a time when many independent States were trying to determine the course of their social progress and economic development and to improve the living conditions of the masses. Those countries faced difficulties resulting from the crisis of the capitalist economies, the drop in their exports caused by the refusal of the imperialist countries to agree to more equitable financial terms and the backwardness which they had inherited from their colonial past.

43. The Soviet republics, including the Byelorussian SSR, had overcome similar problems and had twice recovered from the ruin and destruction caused by war, instituting political and economic changes which had put an end to private ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of man by man. The basic elements of their policy were planned economic development, socialist

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(Mr. Martynov, Byelorussian SSR)

competition between workers as a catalyst for industrial production, intensive industrialization, socialization of agriculture through the establishment of production co-operatives and, more recently, co-operation between fraternal countries and the co-ordination of national economic plans. The Byelorussian SSR, which at one time had been a backward country overwhelmed by disease, poverty and illiteracy, was now a highly industrialized country with mechanized agriculture and an industrial output 25 times as great as before the war in spite of the destruction that had been suffered.

44. The result of the changes made had been the establishment of a socialist society in which all citizens fully exercised all their rights and freedoms, including the right to work and the right to choose an occupation in accordance with level of education and training and with social needs; a society in which education was free, in which unemployment did not exist and in which socially useful work determined a person's status. In the past 10 years, real per capita income had doubled and as much housing had been built as in the previous 50 years.

45. The Constitution of the Byelorussian SSR also guaranteed the right to decent housing and the right to social security, for which the funds were to be provided by enterprises and institutions, not from workers' wages; the active participation of workers in the management of social and State matters through the soviets of working people's deputies, debates on measures submitted to a referendum, and so forth; the right to participate in social organizations and the right of such organizations to promote legislative measures.

46. The Byelorussian SSR had been one of the first countries to supply information concerning item 78, in accordance with resolution 31/38. However, the report in document E/1978/19 was unsatisfactory in that it distorted the information which had been provided. For example, in paragraph 7 of part I it was stated that the Byelorussian SSR had continued to seek stabilization of prices, whereas the report of the Byelorussian SSR had stated that the absence of inflation and the stability of retail prices had been factors contributing to the increased incomes of Byelorussian workers. Hardly any attention was given to Soviet experience in the sections on employment and social security and social welfare and in part III of the report; that was surprising in view of the usefulness of such experience.

47. It was necessary to point out that neither the provisions of resolution 3273 (XXIX) nor those of resolution 31/38 concerning the holding of interregional and regional seminars for the study of national experience had been implemented.

48. With respect to item 80, the report prepared by the Secretary-General in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2074 (LXII) (E/1978/29) reached some true conclusions by stating that there was no incompatibility between economic growth and equality, by rejecting the idea that income inequality was a prerequisite for economic growth and also by observing that a high concentration of income was an obstacle to development and that the concentration of producer goods generated a greater concentration of income. The logical conclusion was that a more equitable distribution could be achieved only when the ownership of the means of production was no longer concentrated in a few hands. However, there was no mention of social

(Mr. Martynov, Byelorussian SSR)

ownership among the measures aimed at achieving a wider diffusion of property and greater public control over the means of production, and that was fundamental in bringing about a better distribution of national income.

49. Ms. BEAGLE (New Zealand) said that social development issues should be accorded a higher priority within United Nations operational activities for development. The objectives of the United Nations in the field of social development had been laid down in the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, and although many delegations had paid lip service to the concept of a unified approach to development, in recent years almost all efforts had been directed towards the implementation of the economic goals of the Strategy for the Second Development Decade.

50. New Zealand was convinced of the need for the organs of the United Nations system concerned with social development to play an active role in the review and appraisal of the achievements and failures of the Second Development Decade and in the formulation of the third development strategy. If the new strategy was to be fully integrated, it would require a careful examination of the nature of the social changes that were currently taking place and of the impact of such changes on societies in general and on disadvantaged groups in particular, as well as a recognition of the interaction of economic, social, cultural and political factors in development. Although it was difficult to quantify and analyse social developments and although programmes for social development must be formulated at the national and regional levels in order to be attuned to the particular conditions of the countries concerned, the United Nations could play an important role. For example, it could monitor changes in the fabric of societies, identify new objectives, provide advice on the interrelationship between economic and social factors and suggest guidelines to Governments.

51. The social development sector of the United Nations system had not received the attention it deserved, as was indicated, in particular, by the fact that the review and appraisal of the International Development Strategy took place exclusively in the Second Committee. Owing, in part, to the lack of co-ordination between the work of the Second and the Third Committees, much of the valuable work done by the Commission for Social Development, the Commission on the Status of Women and other relevant bodies, which had carried out many studies on the participation of minority groups in development planning and on the integration of women, youth, the elderly and the disabled into the development process, were not being taken into account. Her delegation was therefore gratified by the presence in the Third Committee of the Assistant Secretary-General for Development Research and Policy Analysis and hoped that his participation, together with that of the Assistant Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, would lead to an improvement in the co-ordination of economic and social activities in the United Nations system. It was also encouraged by the statement made by the Under-Secretary-General for International Economic and Social Affairs to the Second Committee to the effect that his Department would attempt to promote a more integrated approach to the analysis of economic and social issues and to reinforce activities relating to specific social development issues. She was sure that the Third Committee would welcome a similar exposition of policy from the Under-Secretary-General and an opportunity to make observations which might be of use to him in working towards a unified approach to development.

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(Ms. Beagle, New Zealand)

52. The New Zealand delegation, which had supported Economic and Social Council resolution 2079 (LXII), noted that there had not yet been a meeting of the working group provided for in that resolution for the purpose of examining the operational effectiveness of social development activities and of the United Nations co-ordination machinery with respect to such activities. In its resolution 1978/35 the Economic and Social Council had decided to entrust the task of evaluating social development programmes in the first instance to the competent bodies of the United Nations system and had requested the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC), the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) and the Committee for Development Planning (CDP) to report to the General Assembly on the subject. It was to be hoped that by the time the Committee began consideration of item 12 (Report of the Economic and Social Council) the reports of ACC and CDP would be available so that it might consider them in a consolidated manner. Her delegation remained convinced that there was a need for a small group of experts to carry out the evaluation in question.

53. With respect to the documentation on items 78 and 80, the Secretariat was to be congratulated on the comprehensive document on distribution of income (E/1978/29). The New Zealand delegation had doubts, however, about the value of document E/1978/19. The fact that over a two-year period so few countries had replied to the Secretary-General's request for information on item 78 indicated that there was little point in requesting generalized information on such a wide-ranging subject. On the other hand, 64 Governments, the specialized agencies and some non-governmental organizations had replied to the questionnaire on national experience in promoting the co-operative movement, and consequently document E/1978/15 was more representative and more useful. The New Zealand delegation supported draft resolution A/C.3/33/L.3 and welcomed its emphasis on the involvement of disadvantaged and minority groups in the co-operative movement.

54. Regarding the problems of the elderly and the aged (item 87), New Zealand had always maintained that the United Nations should not attempt to make general studies or elaborate universal guidelines on the subject, owing to the great differences in national situations. There was no difference of opinion about the basic principle involved, namely, the right of aged persons to a full life. That right was covered by article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and had been recognized in more detail in the Declaration on Social Progress and Development. The aged were one of the minority groups which were frequently neglected in development planning; the resulting wastage of human resources was common to all countries. The United Nations should stimulate international interest in the problems facing elderly persons and should assist Governments to implement policies for the aged as part of their over-all development programmes. It could also promote research, the gathering of statistical data and the exchange of information. The information exchange system on the aging was a most useful development, and New Zealand would be glad to contribute information to it.

55. Her delegation's belief that the most effective programmes were those which operated on the national and regional level led it to adopt a cautious approach to the proposal for an international year and world assembly on aging, since the proliferation of such occasions could reduce their effectiveness. The report on

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(Ms. Beagle, New Zealand)

the item (A/33/265), and section III in particular, contained a number of practical proposals which could benefit national planners and legislators. If the United Nations decided to proceed with the proclamation of an international year on aging, careful attention should be paid to the matter of dates and organization. It would also be necessary to bear in mind the need to carry out adequate preparatory and ancillary activities. Like other small countries, New Zealand faced serious manpower and finance problems in observing in quick succession a number of international years devoted to social issues.

56. Referring to item 92, she welcomed the decision not to press on with an international convention on adoption law, in view of the complexity of the subject and the difference in attitudes of Member States owing to widely differing cultural traditions and social welfare structures. The emphasis of United Nations activity should be directed towards encouraging the development of national and regional child welfare programmes which included safeguards for the adoption of children. It would be preferable to draw up a declaration of principles of good adoption practice, in the light of which countries might examine their own laws. She looked forward to the convening of the group of experts on that subject.

57. New Zealand considered that, in dealing with social change, it was important to recognize that a sense of personal security was a prerequisite for a stable society. The extent to which the international community would be able to implement both the economic and the social goals of the International Development Strategy would depend to a considerable extent upon the way in which human rights in general were protected and fulfilled. That pointed up the fundamental responsibility of the Committee to ensure that social development and human rights issues were not ignored in the Assembly's consideration of global economic questions.

58. Mgr. DI FILIPPO (Observer for the Holy See), referring to item 87, recalled that Paul VI had said that the worth of civilization was measured by the attention it offered aged persons to be able to live a fitting life as full members of society. A few months earlier, the Secretariat of State of the Holy See had charged the Pontifical Commission for the Family to follow that delicate moral and social question and to submit proposals with a view to holding a world assembly and an international year on aging, initiatives which the Holy See intended to support.

59. His delegation had closely studied the Secretary-General's report (A/33/265) and looked forward to studying the report to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council in 1979 on experiences of previous international years, which would serve as a basis for establishing uniform criteria and procedures for initiatives of that kind. His delegation had also noted the reasons adduced by those who considered that the needs of the aging, different as they were from country to country, could best be studied at a regional level. However, like the majority of Member States, the Holy See believed that, if properly prepared and implemented, the international year and the world assembly could reach their objectives.

60. In particular, it was convinced that a world assembly could offer a unique opportunity to develop guidelines and recommendations aimed at arousing awareness of the aging process and of the problems of the aged; creating a spirit of

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co-operation at both local and regional levels; developing co-ordinated programmes and technical recommendations for a world plan of action on issues relating to aging, particularly as they concerned population and development; and studying the feasibility of observing an international year. To succeed in reaching those objectives, it was clearly necessary to have the assistance of all concerned United Nations organizations, the expertise of relevant non-governmental organizations and an effective and co-ordinating mechanism such as the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

61. The Holy See, through its world-wide network of Catholic organizations, was willing to promote all initiatives in favour of the aging, and considered that, in order to prepare a world assembly and an international year, it was essential to organize conferences, seminars and workshops at the local and regional levels. In that connexion, he recalled that, at a gathering recently held in Teramo, Italy, with the participation of United Nations representatives and the Pontifical Commission for the Family, the Assistant Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs had said she would be happy to see that the theme of the conference, which was to view aging as an integral part of society, and not as a problem per se, was very similar to the United Nations approach. The conclusions adopted at that conference reflected the spirit of General Assembly resolutions, as they recognized the invaluable role played by older people in the history of development and world peace. They had also reaffirmed the rights of older people to economic and social security, health and decent living facilities, the right and indeed the responsibility to secure and retain employment and to engage in a useful, productive and, if desired, remunerative occupation, their right to continue to increase their intellectual and spiritual development, and their right to be truthfully portrayed by all communication media.

62. Aging was not an infirmity or a disability per se, nor should it be considered a disgrace, a burden or a problem. Certainly, there were problems accompanying old age, as in the case of birth, childhood or youth. The Church had constantly cared for those incapable of leading an independent life and needed assistance in specialized institutions. For that reason, he welcomed the fact that the General Assembly, in its resolution 31/123, had proclaimed the year 1981 International Year for Disabled Persons, and he hoped that that initiative would serve to improve the situation of disabled persons and promote research, especially in the related issues of aging. Since aging could not be stopped, all had the right to live through the process gracefully and peacefully.

63. Needless to say, the Holy See could not share the opinion that old age was the beginning of the end. One of the most urgent roles of today's aged was that of establishing a pattern of life for those who followed, a pattern which needed constant adaptation from one generation to another. There was a need to re-establish the rituals which gave a sacred quality to each age of life. There was a new stage of spiritual intensity towards the end of life when the mind was disengaged from the world of time. The life process was taking on a new form while it faded in another form; life was undergoing its supreme transformation.

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64. It was true that the later years of life were difficult, painful and often lived in isolation, but the inner meaning of that period of life must be recognized. Therefore, taking into consideration that the aged would have the highest percentage increase in the world's population during the current decade, a world assembly on aging seemed to be of the utmost urgency. The Holy See believed that such an assembly would provide an opportunity to reinterpret the life process and thus eliminate fear and anxiety. The aging process represented the consummation of time and the prelude to eternity.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.