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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION HEARS GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY VIEWS

ON INNOVATIONS IN EMPLOYMENT CREATION

Poverty Alleviation, Youth Unemployment, Informal Job Sector among Topics Discussed

With a global consensus emerging that job creation was a major path out of poverty, the Commission for Social Development today convened a panel of civil society and Government experts to discuss innovations in employment creation, such as concrete labour market policies to create employment and improve well-being and employability, as well as good practices in ensuring decent work, particularly for women, youth and the elderly.

The participants -- a diverse group that included a Lutheran minister from Namibia, a Government rural development adviser from India, a Brazilian labour analyst, and an advocate for disadvantaged elderly people -- focused on specific initiatives such as cash transfer programmes to alleviate poverty and create jobs, but they generally agreed on the need to address widespread youth unemployment, harness globalization to create decent jobs, and create an enabling environment for the fast expansion of private sector jobs through increased investments.

They also expressed concern that, within the vast informal job sector, there were many people, usually women and children, working on their own, often isolated in unsafe surroundings, merely surviving and nothing more. So, recalling that the panel was entitled "good practices for promoting full employment for all", they stressed the need to ensure that working conditions and the processes in small and informal enterprises became part of a much wider framework of economic growth, social stability and recognition of social protection.

Panel moderator Jose Manuel Salazar, Executive Director of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Employment Sector, said the challenge was to initiate economic and social policies that would drive job creation. In terms of policymaking, existing good practices demonstrated the need for an integrated approach to employment and decent work issues, involving key ministries and departments, as well as industries and the private sector. He added that effective employment strategies should lead to the adoption of sectoral approaches, interventions and incentives across labour-intensive and high-productivity sectors.

Opening the dialogue, Namibian Bishop Zephania Kameeta, Evangelical Lutheran Church, said it was important to emphasize the "for all" phrase tacked on to the end of the title of today's discussion. That was what made the difference. It meant asking for and demanding what politicians called a "turn-around strategy". Bishop Kameeta, along with a group of other church leaders, representatives of non-governmental organizations and trade unions, had launched a campaign to promote the idea of a basic income grant to reduce poverty in Namibia, which had the most unequal distribution of income in the world.

The scheme, which would pay every Namibian citizen 100 Namibian dollars (\$14) a month, had been made by the Namibia Tax Consortium in 2002 and aimed to address extreme poverty in that country, where two thirds of the population lived below the poverty line. He said that the Income Grant was more than an income support programme: it provided security that

reinforced human dignity and empowerment, while supporting economic growth, household development and job creation at the same time. It also provided necessary funds to help people enter the job market and was a tool to help rectify market distortions towards the realization of decent work.

Santosh Mehrotra, Adviser for Rural Development, Planning Commission of India, focused on India's National Rural Employment Guarantee programme, which had been enacted in September 2005. India was one of the fast-developing countries in Asia, with one of the largest populations in the world and a large surplus labour force in rural areas. The previous Government's "India Shining" campaign had failed to win votes in the May 2004 elections, and the current Government had come to power on a rural/agricultural development vote, he said.

Under the new programme, for 2006-2007, some 200 poorest districts of India's 619 districts had been identified for the implementation of the first phase of the project, and in 2007-2008, another 132 backward districts would be added, he continued. During the initial stages, pre-existing programmes would continue in the rest of the country. He said the Rural Employment Guarantee was expected to provide a social safety net for the vulnerable groups; eliminate distress migration through local employment; and enhance livelihood security in rural areas by work that developed the infrastructure base of the areas involved.

Panellist Sonia Rocha, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Studies on Labour and Society in Brazil, spoke about that country's "Bolsa-Familia", or Family Stipend, which had been created in 2003. The programme had two basic goals: in the short run, it sought to reduce poverty immediately through small, but regular cash transfers to poor families. And Sylvia Beals, Policy Development Manager of HelpAge International, a global network working with and for disadvantaged older women and men to make sustainable change, called for more focus on the social protection/social transfer pillar of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

Following an interactive discussion that included Government delegations and civil society representatives, the Commission picked up its general debate, in which more than 20 speakers touched on a range of issues, including the need for Governments to make policy choices to promote full employment and decent work for all, including macroeconomic policies to create an enabling environment for employment and decent work. They also raised issues concerning the effects of migration and labour mobility on world labour markets, youth unemployment, the importance of education and technology transfer, and the dire employment situation on the African continent and its effect on sustainable development there.

Participating in the general debate was the Minister for Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly of Malawi. A Representative of Venezuela's National Assembly also spoke.

Also participating in the general debate were the representatives of Jamaica, Central African Republic, Switzerland, Syria, Iran, Israel, Zambia, Tunisia, Monaco, Sudan, Norway, Italy, India, Algeria, Chile, Republic of Korea, Bangladesh, Colombia and Yemen.

The Commission will meet again Monday, 12 February, at 10 a.m. to continue its general debate on "promoting full employment and decent work for all", and hold a panel discussion on ageing.

Background

The Commission for Sustainable Development continued its forty-fifth session today, holding a panel discussion on good practices for promoting full employment in the morning. It was expected to continue its general debate in the afternoon.

Panel Discussion

Opening the dialogue, the moderator of the panel discussion, JOSE MANUEL SALAZAR, Executive Director of the International Labour Organization's Employment Sector, said that there was a wide consensus in the Commission on the need to promote full employment and decent work for all. The challenge now related to operationalizing the economic and social policies to achieve that goal. In terms of policymaking, existing good practices demonstrated the need to consider employment and decent work issues in an integrated manner, with the involvement of all key ministries and departments, as well as industries and the private sector. Policy integration

and coherence posed major challenges in that regard. Employment should also be taken into consideration in the development strategies. For its part, the ILO had been working with social partners towards inclusion of decent work in countries' Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

On the macroeconomic level, the employment content of growth had diminished, he continued. The increase in unemployment and adverse impact of globalization on job creation should be addressed through specific strategies to improve job growth. Effective employment strategies should lead to the adoption of sectoral approaches, interventions and incentives across labour-intensive and high-productivity sectors. As a recent World Economic and Social Survey stressed, the ability to sustain economic and productivity growth was associated with the capacity to diversify, attract new activities, strengthen linkages within the countries and capacity to create domestic technological capabilities. Trade policies and the investment climate were to be treated wisely. The quality of countries' export portfolios was of great importance.

The main challenge for Governments was to create a favourable environment for industries to create jobs, he said. Good practices in the workplace, including good labour relations, needed to be promoted. International labour guidelines provided a good basis in that regard. Nokia in Finland was a good example, where success was achieved not only due to good engineering, but also through the creation of good working conditions. It was also important to target particular groups, including women, persons with disabilities, youth, indigenous people and other vulnerable segments of the population; assess progress; and avoid fragmentation. Some of the most successful youth employment programmes provided training and job-placement services, in some cases combined with fiscal incentives to companies to hire young workers. Some countries were channelling their efforts towards industries that could provide youth employment, for example companies involved in technology and tourism.

Education made people employable, and skills training and lifelong learning were at the centre of all high-productivity sectors, he said. Investment in human capital and training systems in response to new competence requirements should be promoted.

Panellist Bishop ZEPHANIA KAMEETA, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Namibia, who had been a leader in the establishment of a basic income grant in the country, said that there would be no need for anyone to be here if indeed there was a good practice model for promoting employment and decent work "for all". Still, even though the international community was struggling to find the answer to that important question, today's discussion provided a perfect opportunity for everyone to share their experiences, proposals -- and failures. Further, it was clear that stakeholders "were on the road" towards a good practice model.

For Namibia, "good/best practice" was not the story of the poor young dishwasher who worked hard and became a millionaire. And while the country had its share of such stories of individual achievement, it was important to emphasize the "for all" phrase tacked on to the end of the title of today's panel discussion. That was what made the difference. It meant asking for and demanding what politicians called a "turn-around strategy." It also meant taking a hard look at current socio-economic and employment indicators on the ground. With that in mind, he said that decent employment was a matter of survival for the people of Namibia.

According to the latest Social Development report, Namibia held the sad distinction of being the most "unequal" society in the world, he said. Despite Namibia's classification as a "lower-middle-income" country, about two thirds of the people lived below the poverty line, so having a job was a matter of "being or not being" since there were scarcely any safety nets and virtually no possibilities of making a decent living outside the formal sector. Worse, he said, was that, despite calls from across the political spectrum for large-scale job creation initiatives, no relief was in sight. According to the most recent available labour statistics, 36.7 per cent of the population was unemployed.

The figures were even more dramatic and distressing for younger people and women, he said, noting that the unemployment rate among teenagers and young adults 15 to 19 years old was 64.6 per cent, and among 20- to 25-year-olds, at 57.4 per cent. In fact, for most young Namibians, there was basically no chance for employment. For most of the poor and unemployed, the daily quest to just survive took up time and energy collecting water and firewood. Some other survival activities -- commercial sex work, criminal activity, foraging for food in dumps -- posed serious dangers and risked future productivity.

If the international community was searching for employment solutions "for all," or at

least for a large portion of the poverty-stricken masses, it would be necessary to remedy structural injustices, which perpetuated the ever-increasing unemployment and poverty rates.

After highlighting the Namibian Government's efforts to turn things around, including through the creation of public/private partnerships and the creation of Economic Processing Zones to attract foreign investment, he said civil society was now backing a Basic Income Grant for Namibia. The scheme, which had been first proposed by the national tax commission, included a monthly cash grant of no less than \$14 United States paid to every citizen up to pension age, at which point he or she would then be eligible for existing universal State assistance.

He said that the Income Grant was more than an income support programme: it provided security that reinforced human dignity and empowerment, and had the capacity to become the most significant poverty-reduction programme in the country, while supporting economic growth, household development and job creation at the same time. He said that, among other things, the Income Grant provided necessary funds to help people enter the job market and was a tool to help rectify market distortions towards the realization of decent work.

SONIA ROCHA, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Studies on Labour and Society in Brazil, spoke about that country's "Bolsa-Familia", or Family Stipend, which had been created in 2003. The programme had two basic goals: in the short run, it sought to reduce poverty immediately through small, but regular cash transfers to poor families. Since the transfer was conditioned on vaccination and school attendance by children, it was expected that the programme would reduce poverty in the long run, as well. Today, it was the largest cash transfer programme targeting the poor in the world, with monthly benefits paid to some 11 million in December last year. The programme considered the woman in the family as the reference person. The stipend was credited to a bank account and withdrawn with a magnetic card.

The Family Stipend was the heir of federal transfer programmes that had been in place in Brazil since the 1990s, including the Scholarship Programme and the Food Stipend Programme, she continued. Compared with its predecessors, it had lowered the selection criterion from \$82 to under \$48 in family per capita monthly income. The value of the benefit now ranged from \$20 to \$45 per family per month. All families that met the income criterion -- and not just families with children -- were eligible to receive the benefits. The advantages of having a single integrated cash transfer programme allowed the Government to avoid overlapping of beneficiaries in different programmes, reduce costs, and create a basis for an articulated and multidimensional social assistance system for the poor.

Despite the achievements, there was still much room for improving the targeting of families, she said. There were still almost 5 million families that qualified for the programme according to the income criterion, but were not receiving the transfer. Selection and listing of families by local authorities was done hastily and with very limited means, which led to problems in the data basis for follow-up and evaluation. There was also much overlapping.

Panellist SYLVIA BEALS, Policy Development Manager of HelpAge International, a global network working with and for disadvantaged older women and men to make sustainable change, said the Decent Work Agenda was critical to older people, particularly as the number of people over 60 was set to explode in the next 20 years. And since as much as 80 per cent of the workforce was in the developing world -- dominated by work in the informal sector -- that meant that huge numbers of elderly people would soon be working in "poor quality" or insecure jobs.

So the Decent Work Agenda should take a very clear line on support for the elderly, just as it did with women and youth, all of whom made up the bulk of the informal economy, had low incomes and lacked social protection. She went on to say that the social protection/ social transfer pillar of the Decent Work Agenda also deserved more attention because such focus could reduce poverty gaps for many of the world's elderly people by supporting post-employment or retirement services or benefits, as well as support for the staggering numbers of elderly people that would be caring for sick and dying relatives in countries that had been ravaged by the AIDS pandemic.

She said that social security was a universal right and implementing transfers was a clear indication of political intent to address vulnerability and support the poorest. Social transfers also delivered rapid impacts, or "quick wins" for poverty reduction. She stressed that investment in social security was a political process, not an unaffordable dream. Indeed,

political will existed, but real action was needed to ensure that social protection/social security was included and resourced via national development programmes with the support of development partners, Governments and civil society.

SANTOSH MEHROTRA, Adviser, Rural Development, Planning Commission of India, focused on India's National Rural Employment Guarantee programme, which had been enacted in September 2005. India was one of the fast-developing countries in Asia, with one of the largest populations in the world and a large surplus labour force in rural areas. The previous Government's "India Shining" campaign had failed to win votes in May 2004 elections, and the current Government had come to power on a rural/agricultural development vote. The work employment programmes that had been put in place prior to the current one had been characterized by low coverage and bureaucracy-dominated planning. Over 50 per cent of their beneficiaries had not belonged to the neediest group, and only 16 to 29 days of employment were provided per household.

Under the new programme, for 2006-2007, some 200 poorest districts of India's 619 districts had been identified for the implementation of the first phase of the project, and in 2007-2008, another 132 backward districts would be added, he continued. During the initial stages, pre-existing programmes would continue in the rest of the country. The Rural Employment Guarantee was expected to provide a social safety net for the vulnerable groups; eliminate distress migration through local employment; generate employment in the most deprived areas; provide opportunity to combine growth with equity; and enhance livelihood security in rural areas by work that developed the infrastructure base of the areas involved. The programme would provide work for 100 days in a financial year to one member of a household, who would volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Employment was to be provided within 15 days of application for work, and if that was not done a daily unemployment allowance would be paid. At least one third of the beneficiaries had to be women. Drinking water, emergency health care, crèches and a child "minder" were to be provided at work sites.

In connection with the programme, the tasks at the central level included the need to formulate the guidelines and funding arrangements for the programme and to ensure efficient delivery and monitoring of the scheme. At the district level, authorities would need to estimate demand for work; initiate participatory planning, giving a principal role to the village assemblies; and ensure professional support for planning. The central Government would bear the entire wage cost of unskilled manual workers, 75 per cent of the material costs and wages of skilled or semi-skilled workers, expenses of the National Employment Guarantee Council and administrative expenses. The state governments would bear 25 per cent of the material costs and wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers, as well as unemployment allowances and administrative expenses at the state level. The work to be undertaken under the programme included water conservation and harvesting, irrigation, land development, flood control and construction of roads.

When delegations and civil society representatives took the floor, one speaker stressed that some employers, particularly small business owners, often discriminated against elderly and disabled people. Was there any way the international community, particularly civil society, could put pressure on the private sector to make room for so-called vulnerable groups? Disabled and elderly people certainly had much to offer, he added.

Another speaker said that, while there was no such thing as a "one size fits all" job creation strategy, there was a need for a consistent international approach. She asked if any of the panellists had considered such an approach to improve conditions and social security in the informal sector.

On income transfers to the poor, one speaker said that such schemes should not be permanent. They must be complimentary to job creation initiatives, and alleviate some of the constraints poor people faced as they searched for jobs or when they entered the labour force for the first time. Such measures must be slowly removed over time. He asked what strategies were being considered to end such income support programmes and move towards the creation of more and better jobs. Similarly, another speaker asked if the panellist saw such transfer schemes as permanent or as temporary ways to jump-start employment creation services.

A civil society representative expressed concern that youth did not have the same access to full and decent employment and were often left out of decision-making on job creation measures. A delegate from the Caribbean region asked if the income transfer programmes that

had been mentioned actually led to “decent” work or just “made up a job”. Another wondered what regional impediments were the biggest obstacles to the South solving its own job creation problems.

Several speakers expressed concern about the term “decent work”. Some felt it should be applied to businesses and companies, who often treated workers as mere placeholders or “numbers”, not to people seeking employment. Others were more comfortable with the more people-centred term “respectable employment”, which they felt took into account social concerns.

Responding to comments from the floor, Mr. KAMEETA highlighted the importance of skill improvement, which went hand in hand with job creation. Although the critics of basic income grants said that they taught people to be lazy, he believed they were an important tool in breaking the scandalous circle of poverty. Scepticism did not discourage the proponents of such measures, who intended to continue their efforts to combat poverty.

Ms. ROCHA said that the Family Stipend programme did not intend to eliminate poverty, but sought to alleviate the situation, improving the income level in the country. Once enrolled in the programme, the families could stay as long necessary. The Government intended to also increase incomes through economic development and job creation measures. As for monitoring, with 11 million families participating in the current programme, it was more difficult to monitor than the School Scholarship and Food Stipend programmes, which had been implemented through schools, health clinics and nursing stations. To address the problem, the Government was introducing family questionnaires, among other things.

Ms. BEALS said that, to overcome negative stereotypes, it was important to have a clear view of the contributions that disadvantaged groups, including disabled people, brought to society. All people had a right to be included. Partnerships among the disadvantaged groups -- for example; elderly and people with disabilities -- could be an effective tool in ensuring decent work for all. To better reach people, it was necessary to prioritize various groups in social security provisions at the state level.

Regarding the affordability of old-age pensions, she said that the cost of social protection was not impractical, and Governments needed to have political will to promote it. It was important to ensure that the poor did not fall below a certain standard. A recent meeting in Bangkok had looked at old-age provisions in terms of population ageing in Asia. The existence of pension schemes in such countries as Nepal and India showed that important shifts were taking place there, which, she hoped, international partners would support.

Mr. MEHROTRA said that, if one adult member of rural families was given 100 days of employment on a guaranteed basis every year, many families would be lifted above the poverty line in India. While some questions about the implementation of the programme remained, it was clear that it was important to include local communities in the planning of the programme, letting them identify the main priorities. The programme was intended to be “employment of last resort” -- it was not a solution to all employment issues.

He said that some 93 per cent of workers in India were involved in the informal sector, and it was the Government’s duty to provide protection to those people. The Parliament was currently looking at the possibility of providing social insurance for the informal sector, including pensions and maternity and disability benefits. Industrialized countries had some responsibilities in that respect, as well. Many companies from developed countries were now cutting costs through transfer of work and contracts to developing countries, and there should be some expectation of their Governments that their companies would take upon themselves some degree of social protection for workers.

Regarding development of skills, he said that for some years, the World Bank had insisted that general secondary education was better than vocational training. The trouble was that vast numbers of generally educated young people could not find jobs. For that reason, it was important to “vocationalize” the secondary school education. It was also necessary to upgrade skills of those people who only had primary education, or were illiterate. Local resource centres at village level could be important in that regard.

Wrapping up the dialogue, the moderator mentioned skills development, organization of

workers in the informal economy, social protection and legal empowerment among the issues discussed today. All those could become components of an integrated strategy for employment creation. Environmental and labour standards needed to be applied. Socially responsible investments by companies should be encouraged.

FAITH INNERARITY, Chief Technical Director, Ministry of Labour and Security for Jamaica, said the link between employment and social development had been clearly established in the Copenhagen Declaration and Plan of Action. However, more than a decade later, achieving full employment and ensuring decent work was still proving difficult, particularly for countries in the developing world. Turning to the situation in her region, she said there were a number of factors affecting employment trends, including decline in agricultural exports and the corresponding reduction of employment in the sector, the trend in foreign direct investment, which tended to favour countries without strong regulations and trade unions.

There was also a need to reform skills training and education programmes to increase employability and, most importantly, to match skills with changes in the job market. She added that the emergence of the working poor was another concern. That population was often relegated to elementary and agricultural occupations. Jamaica was also concerned by the increase in the size of the informal sector and the rise of non-standard employment relationships. Also, contract workers, one of the most common forms of non-standard employment, did not normally enjoy social security benefits and were often denied other rights such as union membership.

To counter some of those trends, Jamaica, and the wider Caribbean Community (CARICOM) region had actively engaged the tripartite partners -- Governments, employers, and workers' organizations -- in a dialogue to address decent work and employment issues. She said the ILO-backed Caribbean Tripartite Employment Forum, convened in Barbados last year, had adopted a declaration and action plan for realizing the Decent Work Agenda in the region.

The plan stressed, among other things, the need to identify and analyse specific factors that resulted in disproportionately high unemployment among youth. A highlight of that event had been a special panel on the Jamaican Youth Employment Network, part of the Youth Employment Network initiative backed by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, she added.

FERNAND POUKRÉ-KONO (Central African Republic) said that the concept of full employment in developing countries met with many constraints. A large number of unskilled and unemployed persons contributed to the situation of poverty, but countries did not have the means of facing competition and attracting foreign investment in today's markets. African countries were very sensitive to fluctuations of commodity prices, and many people left rural areas in search of work in the cities. Many also relied on subsistence farming, and it was important to improve their conditions. African countries were also experiencing a loss of qualified personnel and executive staff, who emigrated to better-paying countries.

A large number of working-age people suffered from HIV/AIDS, he continued. Women represented a vulnerable group, and many of them were marginalized and lived in extreme poverty. There was also a total absence of social coverage. Only a good labour and employment strategy at the national level could rectify that situation for African countries. Closer partnerships between the public and private sectors were needed, as well as social coverage. Young people were the hope for a better future, and it was important to focus attention on the private sector to improve their situation. It was necessary to pursue a beneficial macroeconomic policy, which could encourage investments.

CHRISTIAN SIEBER (Switzerland), focusing on the central role of the State, said that, at the economic level, States must establish conditions that favoured effective markets and the development of the private sector. That should be done by combining different objectives of macroeconomic policy, notably price stability, economic growth and the creation of decent employment. Particular attention needed to be paid to small and medium-sized enterprises and, by creating favourable conditions for such enterprises, the State strengthened the dynamism of the private sector.

He went on to say that the State should also promote labour market policy adapted to the needs of the economy and respectful of fundamental social rights, particularly those of the most vulnerable persons and groups. Priority should be given to access to decent employment

and education, and legislation should be implemented by trustworthy, transparent and responsible institutions. He turned secondly to the role of the private sector, as the main creator of jobs. Among other things, he stressed that that role imposed a special responsibility to create decent jobs that respected the framework conditions established in economic, social and environmental fields.

On youth, he said the Swiss Government was taking steps to combat unemployment. At the national level, it was improving supply by favouring the maintenance and creation of new apprenticeship positions. It was also promoting demand by supporting young people who were looking for apprenticeships. That support took the form, for example, of individual assistance for young people who had completed their compulsory schooling and were looking for such apprenticeships. Switzerland's initiatives also included offering temporary work, as well as mentoring and coaching programmes. The results thus far had been positive, and the number of young people out of work had fallen dramatically, he said.

WARIF HALABI (Syria) supported the position of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China and reiterated her country's commitment to the implementation of the objectives adopted in Copenhagen. Since then, all States had committed themselves to promoting the objective of full employment and to eliminating poverty. It was a moral, social and political necessity, required to achieve stable societies based on justice and advancement of human rights. Syria was taking specific measures in that regard. The country's five-year development plan was in harmony with economic and social guidelines, seeking to build a market economy based on quality and sustainable production. The Government also sought to create job opportunities, emphasizing improvement of performance in the human development and social services sectors. Targeted programmes for balanced regional development were being introduced. Investments would be made in different sectors of society.

In the next 20 years, Syria would be meeting the highest economic criteria in the area of human development, which would be guaranteed to all citizens, she said. That was a starting point for freeing society from poverty and ignorance. Emphasis would also be put on creative spirit to improve productivity. The country's goal was to decrease the number of families living in poverty by half, put an end to illiteracy and decrease unemployment. Syria needed a growth rate of 7 per cent in the period between 2007 and 2010. To implement its plan, the country would seek to improve its channels of cooperation and obtain increased assistance for development.

The planning bodies were taking into account the needs of various sectors to achieve international credit assistance, in particular in the field of vocational and skills training, she continued. Syria was cooperating with international donors to obtain loans and technical assistance. The Government emphasized training of young people, promotion of the role of the family, provision of more choices for young people in the labour market, and ensuring equality between men and women. The country also intended to introduce a strategy to protect older people and persons with disabilities. Necessary studies would be conducted to better evaluate the situation in that regard. To achieve a proper environment for employment and development was an enormous task, and she acknowledged a close link between national and international efforts in that area.

Among the most important elements specific to the region, she also cited instability, foreign occupation, policies of blockade and separation and denial of people's rights. Citizens in occupied territories were denied access to services and opportunities. Advancing decent work for all must take into account all the obstacles that were preventing people of the region from having access to employment and decent work for all.

CLEMENT K. KHEMBO, Minister for Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly for Malawi, said that the reports before the Commission had revealed that employment trends in Africa were the worst in the world. Malawi was no different than many other countries on the continent, where there was little hope of formal sector employment and gaining access to the social security nets that such employment provided. Indeed, the informal sector provided a significant form of employment and accounted for a significant share of total economic activity in Malawi.

He said there were an estimated 747,363 micro-, small and medium enterprises in the country, 83 per cent of which were engaged in agro-economic activity and were located in rural areas. Some 75 per cent were in the non-agricultural sector, mainly in manufacturing, trade and

services, located in urban areas. Some 34 per cent were owned by women, while 91 per cent had less than five employees, he added. Youth unemployment also continued to pose a major challenge, and out of the nearly 300,000 young people who left school every year, only 30,000 or so of those found employment in the formal economy.

In order to address those challenges, he said Malawi had put in place strategies aimed at promoting full employment and decent work for all. Its lead development strategy -- the Malawi Growth and development Strategy, clearly recognized that no meaningful growth and development could be achieved where there was microeconomic instability, gender inequality, unemployment inequality in income distribution and lack of basic social services. The Government was actively developing Malawi's private sector by training ordinary people in small-scale business management skills by providing microfinancing assistance to small businesses. Further, apart from formal education programmes, Malawi was promoting the establishment of community skills development centres at the grass-roots levels.

PAIMANEH HASTEH ([Iran](#)) endorsed the position of the Group of 77 and China and said that full employment and decent work for all remained a highly desirable goal yet to be met. Undoubtedly, employment was a crucial path to the reduction and eradication of poverty. But it was not a problem that only developing nations faced. It was, indeed, a global challenge that should be addressed collectively and through creating a conducive social and economic environment. The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action recognized the link between poverty eradication, employment and social integration.

Despite progress made over the last decade, the world's collective efforts had been impeded by a number of economic and political trends, she said. Unilateral economic measures, politicization of trade and prevention of transfer of science and technology to developing countries and their integration into the international economic system, had considerably hampered those countries' efforts to realize full and productive employment and decent work for their people. If the current trends and disparities remained in place, the world would continue to face deep-rooted obstacles in attaining its objectives.

Iran's Government remained committed to the goals of the World Summit for Social Development and relevant United Nations plans and programmes, she continued. It had made significant efforts to promote policies and develop institutions and programmes that directly or indirectly related to social justice. Great importance was attached to human development, especially in the fields of health, education and fighting poverty and hunger. According to the latest United Nations Common Country Assessment, Iran appeared to be within reach of the level of high human-development countries.

In recent years, the country had seriously begun privatization of State companies by selling 80 per cent of the shares of major State-owned enterprises, and had distributed the shares of those companies among poor and low-income people without charge, she said. That move was expected to set the stage for downsizing the Government, giving an impetus to the economy and creating a competitive atmosphere for private companies. Increasing productivity, attracting foreign investment, reducing mismanagement, combating corruption and controlling inflation were among the Government's main objectives.

MEIRAV EILON SHAHAR ([Israel](#)) said the right to be productive in society, through decent employment was rightfully this session's priority theme. It was perhaps the most far-reaching element of social development. Decent employment allowed better access to food and health care, and promoted the education of children. Equally applied, the opportunity for economic empowerment strongly promoted gender equality. She said that policies promoting full employment and decent work also bolstered all the Millennium Development Goals.

Clearly, social development was both an economic and a rights-based issue, she said, stressing that it was also a matter of State stability. Poverty and instability were often part of the same downward spiral, and there was little opportunity or incentive to invest in unstable States. Further, lack of investment in the future created further unemployment, poverty and instability. To effectively break that cycle, the international community must be conscious of broader political contexts. All must address political systems and ideologies that bred hatred and perpetuated intolerance, and support efforts to strengthen international cooperation and the rule of law.

Nor must the international community avoid the question of demographics, she said,

noting that the world's youth, who were just coming into their productive years, made up a large part of the working population. That was especially true in parts of the developing world. That sobering fact should force stakeholders to reassess their priorities: if the international community did not create a productive place in society for younger workers, it would lose a great resource -- the human potential of the world's young people. There was also the risk of creating a permanent underclass of restive and alienated people without hope.

For its part, Israel had recently implemented a number of community projects designed to reabsorb its at-risk youth into society. The Government had shifted the focus to vocational learning, placing at-risk youth in workplace settings where they could be supervised and learn a skill set. The Government had also implemented an entrepreneurship programme, which integrated youth in normative society while allowing them to acquire practical business skills. Turning to the elderly, she said her Government had launched a community support project in some areas to create a comprehensive assisted-living environment to enhance the lives of the elderly. Among other things, that plan included the development of emergency response systems to deal with urgent medical situations, fire and police needs.

NATHANIEL MWAHACHENGA, Chief of Social Welfare in the Ministry of Community development and Social Services of Zambia, said that his delegation was particularly concerned with global and regional trends and their impacts on employment and job creation. Such trends had had a negative effect throughout the African continent, especially in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Africa also faced other impediments, including low productivity, high demographic growth, brain drain and the ravaging effects of HIV/AIDS on the workforce. He added that human security was intrinsically related to employment, and several aspects of employment, such as wages, income and job stability and decent work, had a direct effect on people's vulnerability.

Zambia, for its part, had adopted a five-year Employment and Labour Market Policy, which was based on wealth and job creation and was aimed at boosting national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. He added that, with the help of the ILO, Zambia had also been drawing up a country programme based on the Decent Work Agenda to help address matters related to full employment and decent work.

On social integration, he said that Zambia had gone a long way to remove obstacles faced by women, youth and persons with disabilities. The country had adopted a national policy aimed at addressing the unique concerns of those vulnerable groups, he said, stressing particularly that women's opportunities to participate in the marketplace had been expanded, but that they still earned less than men. As for youth, Zambia had adopted a Technical Education, Vocation and Entrepreneurship Training Policy that focused on providing skills training for children and youth, even for those who dropped out of school.

SAHBI KHALFALLAH (Tunisia) said that the Copenhagen Summit of 1995 had highlighted the importance of employment by making it a critical issue in development programmes of Member States. Creation of full employment and decent work for all had since become a top priority of national and international policies. Employment had great importance for combating poverty and ensuring sustainable development. When decent work was lacking, a situation arose that was characterised by many other dangers, including drugs and crime. The theme of the current session was of great importance for his Government, which made full employment its priority. Tunisia sought equality and partnership by providing equal salary for equal work. It had also launched socio-economic reforms, which included the objectives of full employment for people. The country's successful experiences were now being applied in several African countries. Training programmes, programmes for persons with disabilities were also among the projects initiated in the country.

As for decent work, Tunisia had introduced assistance for university graduates and young people from families with low income, as well as people with disabilities. In that connection, he noted that 1 per cent of positions in all enterprises were reserved for individuals with disabilities. Coverage regimes had been introduced to improve social security. Family was also a major source of concern, including women, children and the elderly. Full employment and decent work were the lofty objectives, and the international community needed to find solutions to advance those goals. Assailed with globalization, many countries were experiencing difficulties in that regard, but all work was decent to the extent that it guaranteed human dignity.

CLOTILDE A. FERRY (Monaco) said that the right to work was part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet attainment of full employment and decent work remained a concern, and the opportunities provided to women were a key aspect of development. As stated in the Secretary-General's report, there were more women working outside of the home, when policies favoured maternity and paternity and when legislation allowed return to work after taking care of children. For that reason, her Government had undertaken to provide social protection for women, especially as far as maternity and pregnancy were concerned.

The low rate of unemployment in Monaco could be explained by the country's geographical situation and dense concentration of enterprises. Microfinancing was now considered to be an effective strategy for combating poverty, and her Government was creating microloan banks for the promotion of businesses. There was also a programme promoting education for young girls and women in rural areas of Africa. She welcomed the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which, she hoped, would come into force as soon as possible. It was important to promote the employment of people with disabilities and protect their rights. Monaco provided jobs that were adapted to persons who had some disabilities, but were able to work, and created opportunities for remunerative activities for those people.

ABDALMAHMOOD ABDALHALEEM MOHAMAD (Sudan) said the international community had a long way to go towards ensuring employment and decent work for all, while at the same time achieving other globally agreed goals, chiefly those aimed at poverty reduction. The reports before the Commission revealed troubling statistics about economic growth and unemployment trends in the developing world, especially in Africa. In Sudan, the signing of a comprehensive North-South peace agreement had laid the groundwork for increased economic growth, infrastructure repair and attracting foreign investment. The Government was most concerned about rebuilding communities devastated by war and re-integrating the people living in war-torn areas into society.

He said that relevant projects along those lines had been launched in 200 villages, in areas that covered education, health and sanitation. Projects, which had been launched with the help of the World Bank, were under way to improve electricity and power grids. An innovative project would see some areas begin to harness the potential of solar power within the next year. But even with all the plans and programmes in place, it was critical for the wider international community to stand by its commitments made at Copenhagen and at the 2005 World Summit, particularly to promote and indeed ensure technology transfer and training, and boost education facilities and services. Those were among the key ways to ensure full employment and decent work for all.

OLA BREVIK (Norway) said that the past decade had seen a steady increase in unemployment levels. Politically, it was crucial to note that that depressing development had taken place during a period of unprecedented liberalization, deregulations, privatization and strong emphasis on macroeconomic stability, resulting in much-desired increase in international trade, investment and integrated production systems. In short, the past decade of desired globalization had also been the decade of jobless growth. That side-effect of globalization needed to be urgently addressed. The world was facing a challenge of distribution -- not only between rich and poor countries, which was usually the subject of United Nations debates -- but also between different groups and generations, regardless of citizenship. That was increasingly true in the labour market, which was rapidly becoming globalized due to outsourcing and migration.

More than ever, transitions were crucial for people's employability, he continued: transition from school to work, from one job to another, from work to pension, and increasingly also from one country to another. The most pressing requirement was, therefore, a better ability to manage change. In addition to taking active measures to ensure gender equality in the labour market, Governments should pay particular attention to youth employment, the balance of workforce flexibility and job security, pension reform and migration. Besides identifying the crucial role of functioning States and good governance at the national level, a recent report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization had stressed the importance of better governance also on the global level, underscoring the indispensable role of the United Nations.

He said that, while the primary responsibility for good governance and development rested with national Governments, in the age of globalization, decisions taken in one country

could also have ramifications for other countries, both regionally and globally. Therefore, the way labour markets were run in one country was no longer a purely domestic issue. It was necessary to ensure that intergovernmental organizations, including World Trade Organization, ILO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights pulled in the same direction, to stop them from working at cross purposes. It was also necessary to ensure a better balance of economic and social objectives, not least full employment. There was also a need for improved and more coherent governance at the global level.

ALDO MANTOVANI ([Italy](#)) said his country sought to increase employment while reducing regional disparities, by making labour markets more inclusive of young people, women and older persons. Labour would be organized to meet individual needs, through a voluntary programme where employees aged 55 years would be converted to part-time workers, and a corresponding part-time position would be opened to an unemployed or never employed young person. Measures had also been planned to safeguard those who suddenly found themselves without a job, and a social security system for non-standard workers -- where they would be granted sick time, maternity leave and "family unification" -- was currently being studied.

He said the Government's new approach to labour and social protection had inspired a review of the National Reform Programme, and had been presented to the European Union. Italy shared the approach of Germany, which placed at its centre the European social model, and believed in the concept of "flexicurity" to reconcile the need of businesses for flexibility with that of safeguarding the rights of workers. Such flexibility was expected to reduce precarious and off-the-books labour in favour of more stable jobs. To that end, it was important to look for common standards and laws on working conditions, with reference to the work schedule, individual training and social protection.

He said there was no alternative to the reform of economic and social systems in instances where they did not meet the criteria for effectiveness and sustainable growth. The European social model itself would have to adapt to the challenges of globalization and technological and demographic change, but without having to renegotiate European values. As such, workers affected by outsourcing and industrial restructuring needed support programmes. Italy was committed to promote the principles and values of the social model within the international framework.

NIRUPAM SEN ([India](#)) said that there were fears, many well founded, that globalization and liberalization were creating an environment conducive to expanding employment, especially in the private sector. Some had argued that rising unemployment was not due to globalization but to technology. And while it was true that some jobs were being lost in our increasingly mechanized society, it was not a time for computer smashing but computer education, as well as wider investment in education and skills, and a concerted effort to change national and international environments. India had been focused on promoting full and productive employment and decent work, and the country's five-year development plans had always conceptualized the principle of productive employment for all.

He said that a recent five-year plan (2002-2007) had placed a particular focus on the policy environment influencing a wide range of economic activities with large employment potential, such as construction, real estate and housing, transport, small-scale industries, informational technology, financial services and tourism. India had also been implementing various employment and self-employment generation programmes, in addition to a number of poverty alleviation programmes.

He said that India's prominent self-employment programmes for educated and uneducated unemployed people, particularly youth and women, included, among others, the Rural Employment Generation Scheme. Another notable initiative had been the national Rural Employment Guarantee programme, launched last year. That plan made the right to work a fundamental right by providing 100 days assured wage employment annually to every household, and thus created a social safety net, infrastructure and access to health in rural areas. At least one third of the programme's beneficiaries were women, he said.

YOUSRIA SENDID-BERRAH ([Algeria](#)), aligning with the Group of 77 and China, said that the Commission should focus on intensifying the integrative functions of work. In her country of 32 million people, 60 per cent were of working age. The challenge lay in creating economic growth while adequately absorbing the supply of labour. To create 2 million new jobs,

the Government had installed measures to stimulate employment, mitigate the burden of employers -- for example, the need to "declare" their workers to the Government -- and expand the employment base while protecting the rights of children. The country also sought to encourage foreign investment and to establish programmes to aid first-time job seekers. The Government had also embarked on a wide-ranging system of social protection for workers and their families, covering risks related to retirement, accidents and death, as well as providing for maternity leave for female workers.

She said Algeria's employment policy was built on four major postulates: supporting young people aged 19 to 25 engaged in microenterprise; creating jobs for the unemployed aged 35 to 50 years, through the creation of 7,000 microenterprises; providing support to 40,000 new graduates seeking work; and creating jobs for 16,000 women, mainly through the use of microcredit. That policy had indeed shown a drop in employment. While job creation and providing support to workers was the responsibility of States, international cooperation was equally important, especially by creating an environment conducive to investment and the circulation of capital, underpinned by an equitable trade system.

DARIO VIVAS, Representative of the National Assembly of Venezuela, aligning with the Group of 77 and China, said the struggle against poverty should be a permanent point of reference in the Commission's work. Venezuela was certainly committed to eradicating poverty and social and productive exclusion, and sought to restore to people the ability to general wealth by means of productive employment and by developing their potential. This was done, for instance, by eradicating illiteracy and guaranteeing the rights to health, education, food, employment, culture and participation. Also, "Mission Vuelvan Caras" promoted cooperatives and other partnership modalities to create employment.

He said the Venezuelan Magna Carta, drafted in 1999 by the Constituent Assembly, said that all persons had the right and duty to work and that the State should guarantee work for all. It also said that every worker had a right to a salary sufficient to cover basic material needs. The Government had emerged from the financial crisis of 1989 by adopting a radical shift in its thinking: it had been considered necessary to create legal and institutional instruments that protected the social rights of workers, guaranteeing decent work and good working conditions during and after the end of the "labour life".

He said the National Assembly believed that workers' protection should benefit the individual rather than enterprises. Unemployment had fallen by 8.4 per cent as of December 2006. More than 64 per cent of the youth were working, of which more than 10 per cent were included in the Vuelvan Caras Mission during the past six months.

HERALDO MUÑOZ (Chile) said that, in the international arena, economic globalization must go hand in hand with the globalization of standards and conditions that could ensure employment creation and the promotion of decent work. Globalization that did not contemplate that variable would stimulate precarious labour conditions. He said that the concern for decent work was foremost when Chile negotiated bilateral trade agreements. Indeed, in its Free Trade Agreements with Canada, the United States and the European Union, specific clauses had been aimed at assuring full respect for internationally agreed labour rights, which should not be undermined under the pretext of improving commercial matters and concerns.

On the domestic front, Chile had enacted a law on sub-hiring and transitory services, which had entered into force last month. That law aimed at improving the lives of men and women workers and promoting decent and dignified work and working conditions. He said that that law filled a legislative gap and would eventually benefit more than 1 million workers. He also said that there was a direct correlation between decent work and the development and implementation of international commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women. With that in mind, Chile had been promoting job-related good practices that targeted maternity and motherhood, among other areas.

In the area of social protection, he said that Chile was aiming to strengthen trade union rights and the ILO-backed tripartite social dialogue, and would continue to search for consensus on how to achieve decent work in all areas of productive activity and services. He added that Chile's social security reforms aimed at guaranteeing social equity between men and women, and increasing social coverage for self-employed citizens.

SHIN DONG-IK (Republic of Korea) said that trade liberalization in the absence of

complementary policies did not necessarily lead to higher growth. It might even decrease in the short term if countries lacked the financial, human and institutional resources to compete effectively in the global marketplace. Hopefully, the persistent efforts of the United Nations -- working through the ILO, as well as its Commission for Social Development, which paid close attention to the link between poverty eradication and the promotion of full employment -- would give globalization a more human face.

He said that, in his country, the number of economically active people in the population was expected to peak in 2016 before tapering off. Over the years, the labour market policy had had to adapt to structural changes in the industrial sector, as well as the 1997 financial crisis. Job security had been substantially strengthened by expanding the employment safety net and the number of job centres. The weakening growth potential since 2000 had spurred the Government to establish a policy called "Comprehensive Measures for Job Creation" in 2004, in which attention was paid to creating good quality jobs.

In addition, the Government had begun pursuing policies that encouraged fair distribution of wealth so as to minimize social polarization, he said. Policy in 2007 would focus on improving the business environment and improve working conditions for non-regular workers. The ILO Asian Regional Meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, was held to discuss the importance of decent jobs. Reducing unemployment among the disabled, which stood at 23 per cent, would be accomplished by a mandatory employment rate within the public sector, and private companies were encouraged to sign an employment promotion convention for the disabled.

MUHAMMAD ALI SORCAR (Bangladesh) associated himself with the position of the Group of 77 and China and said that his country's experience testified to the fact that economic growth alone could not further poverty eradication or employment generation. To address that issue, focus must be shifted to pro-poor growth. The macroeconomic policies must support employment promotion. Keeping that in view, Bangladesh had adopted four broad-based policies to address those issues at the national level: aiming to increase economic growth to facilitate creation of jobs for the poor; according priority to growth-oriented sectors; implementing targeted poverty reduction and social safety-net programmes for the poor, particularly women; and augmenting investment in sectors like education, health and nutrition. The Government encouraged participation in economic development of the distressed, marginalized and disadvantaged. It had identified education as one of the major preconditions for promotion of employment. Special emphasis was given to the expansion of women's education. A 6 per cent quota had been set in all Government jobs for persons with disabilities, and 1 per cent of posts in the civil service had been earmarked for them.

Bangladesh had reaped enormous benefits from microcredit and non-formal education programmes, he continued, yet unemployment remained a big problem. Migration was an important area of concern. The country was combating trafficking through legislation and believed that protection of the rights of migrant workers and ensuring labour mobility should be accorded due priority at all levels. Despite being resource-strapped, the country remained attentive to all matters concerning youth. A set of skill development programmes had been introduced, and several self-employment programmes had been developed. The Government had also initiative a "Family-Based Employment Programme", which provided small loans to youth against microenterprise. Projects had been launched to involve young people in population control, prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, reproductive health and safe motherhood.

The 2006 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Grammen Bank of Bangladesh and its founder, Muhammed Yunes, was a timely recognition of the efforts for economic and social development from the grass-roots level, he added. The microcredit schemes that were given mostly to poor rural women without collateral had proven to be effective for employment generation. Bangladesh was proud to share that home-grown best practice with others.

CARLOS SUÁREZ (Colombia) said that, since Copenhagen, Colombia had increased its efforts to promote higher levels of quality employment. It had become clear that employment policies in the country required creating economic, institutional and sectoral conditions that strengthened the generation of wealth. It was also clear that growth must benefit the entire population, especially the poorest and most vulnerable sectors, and help them develop their capacities to generate income for themselves.

He said that, six years ago, poverty levels in Colombia had reached nearly 58 per cent. In that "complex environment of insecurity and uncertainty" unemployment levels were close to 20 per cent in urban areas and had hovered at about 15 per cent nationally. But in 2002, the Government of President Alvaro Uribe Vélez had begun to adopt policies aimed at reversing those trends. The positive effects had been unquestionable, he said, noting significant reductions in the levels of poverty and unemployment. The overall transformation had been possible because of the implementation of policies such as the democratic secure policy, which had reduced all crime indicators and had created confidence in economic and social conditions throughout the country.

As for job creation and decent work, he said that Colombia had implemented macroeconomic policies, as well as policies aimed at addressing the specificities of job requirements -- and employment services -- of both urban and rural areas. Colombia also considered it a priority to promote micro-, small and medium companies, all of which generated a large number of jobs in developing countries. He added that Colombia also paid great attention to education and believed that promoting decent work was necessary to increase the scope of social services.

ABDULKADER AHMED SAEED ALSUBEIHI ([Yemen](#)), aligning himself with the Group of 77 and China, said his country agreed with the findings of the Secretary-General's report but saw many obstacles in the face of Member States' efforts to implement the Copenhagen objectives. The imbalance between developed and developing countries was a major obstacle in that regard, with the rich growing ever richer while the poor grew poorer. There was a need to remove tariffs and adopt additional conditions to cater to the needs of least developed countries. At the same time, developing countries needed to practice good governance.

He said development and economic growth underpinned all changes in society. Through economic and financial reform, Yemen had managed to reduce the percentage of poor persons in the population from 43 to 21 per cent in 2005. Development, however, must ensure that social needs were met, and that health and education services were improved. In Yemen, the Constitution guaranteed equal opportunity to education that was free of charge, leading illiteracy to decrease for both men and women in recent years. Vocational training existed to provide employers with qualified workers, but the vocational training system would soon undergo an upgrade to keep up with the needs of the market.

He said persons with disabilities were given basic education, vocational training and job-seeking assistance to boost their chances of success in the job market. In addition, citizens were guaranteed equality before the law, and they would be protected in the case of accidents where no safety net existed. Such integrated reforms intended to reduce poverty included the recent drafting of a social security programme focused particularly on citizens in rural regions. Over \$100 million had been spent on infrastructure projects, for example, as well as microcredit projects to help poor families become more productive. Some 820 jobs had been created through that process, many of which were held by women. With the help of the international community, especially developed countries, countries such as Yemen would be more assured of their success.

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