

STATEMENT BY MR.S.S. AHLUWALIA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL (AGENDA ITEM 97), SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (AGENDA ITEM 98), FOLLOWUP TO THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE OLDER PERSONS: SOCIAL WORLD ASSEMBLY ON AGEING (AGENDA ITEM 99) AT THIRD COMMITTEE OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 7, 2002

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the reports it has prepared and presented to us under this agenda item. I would also like to thank, in particular, the Director of the Social Policy Division, Mr. Johan Scholvink, for his incisive and thought-provoking comments last week, on the role of the Third Committee also known as the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee of the General Assembly. His remarks should serve as a timely reminder to all of us, that we in the Third Committee need to bring the focus back once more to the issues which this Committee is principally charged with, namely, Social Issues. Let there be no doubt in our minds that social development is the very foundation on which other developmental goals rest.

Mr. Chairman,

I am a Member of Parliament from India. Since I became a youth leader in the 1970s, I have endeavoured to work for the equal opportunity of all Indians to acquire education, and in particular, the need for a job oriented education system.

The untiring efforts of the Government of India and those of the various state governments in this respect have succeeded in raising the literacy rates in India from 18 per cent in 1951 at the first census after independence in 1947, to 65 percent in 2001 at the last census. The Government has

committed itself to guaranteeing the rights to compulsory free primary education as a fundamental right through an appropriate Constitutional amendment. It is the aim of my Government to raise literacy rates to 75 percent by the year 2007. With this aim, a separate department of primary education and literacy has been created with a special mandate of enrolling all children in school by 2003. While national efforts in this respect will continue, the observance of the United Nations Literacy Decade from 2003 will be particularly important in achieving the international objective of "education for all". The report on World Social Situation, 2001 had reported on some interesting developments in the field of education. Some of it was heartening, such as the fact that globally, 87 per cent of young adults (aged 15 to 24 years) are literate, on account of increased affirmative action in high population developing countries such as Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India and Mexico. Other features such as estimates of 250 million primary school age children being out of school are, at the same time, truly disturbing. An educated population is essential for social development and nation building in any country. We must make determined efforts to achieve the goals we have set ourselves in the United Nations Literacy Decade.

Mr. Chairman,

The Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid earlier this year provided us with an opportunity to review the progress made since the First World Assembly twenty

years ago, and draw up further plans to mainstream the ageing agenda with global developmental issues.

The Madrid Plan of action focuses our attention on the needs of the future, the timely and energised implementation of which is essential. The report produced by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on World Population Ageing indicates that while ten percent of the global population was aged in 2000 as against 8 percent in 1950, this would increase to 21 percent by the year 2050. In India, the number of older persons was 25.5 million or only 5.8 per cent of the population in 1961; in 1991, this had increased to 56.6 million or 6.7 percent; in 2011, the number is expected to increase to 96 million or 8.1 percent of the total population and the number is expected to grow to 137 million by the year 2021.

We welcome the report of the Secretary General on preparations for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004. We look forward to studying the details of the research studies indicated in the report, which are to be made available shortly. We would like to encourage the United Nations system to make further efforts to raise awareness of this very important aspect of social development in both developed and developing countries, so that Governments and civil society can play their full and active roles in this important area.

Mr. Chairman,

India had at this very forum earlier spoken of the pressing requirement for the international community to work towards the development of adequate opportunities for employment of the youth. In 2001, a 12-member high-level panel was established by the Secretary General to guide the Youth Employment Network. While the approach adopted by the panel in focussing on the four "E"s is to be welcomed, there is need to incorporate the realities of social situations in different economies in bringing about meaningful international cooperation in this sector. We expect the Department of Economic

and Social Affairs to play an important role in this regard.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation is of the firm belief that for social development to be effective, developmental programmes need to be effective at the grass root level. Only through the widespread participation of people, beginning at the village level, can such programmes be successful. In India, the success of the 'Panchayati Raj', i.e. the administering of village affairs by an elected council of five including in the implementation of developmental programmes in cooperation with the Government administrative machinery has contributed to a cohesive societal development since India's independence. In India, with a diversity of language, cultural sensitivity and a strong sense of religious tolerance and secularism; unity in purpose has served to bring about enhanced social development in various sectors including health, education and employment.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in September, 2002 stated "It has become a categorical imperative to understand, and address, man's developmental needs in their totality - and not in isolated parts Humanity is crying out for a harmonious integration of the economic, social, political, environmental and spiritual dimensions of development. This task calls for the closest possible cooperation among nations and communities, with a readiness to accept the best from every cultural and spiritual tradition around the globe". Prime Minister Vajpayee's remarks are particularly relevant in our discussions of these agenda items at this forum.

In his report on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) and of the twenty fourth special session of the General Assembly, the Secretary General provides information on the deliberations of intergovernmental bodies for reviewing the follow-up; on the outcome of

intergovernmental conferences and summits since then; and their link with activities to promote, *inter alia*, the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration. What is reiterated again and again is the importance that is attached to the eradication of poverty. Debilitating poverty is a fundamental problem hindering developmental objectives worldwide, with one-sixth of humanity living in "dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty." This is also one of the important targets adopted in the Millennium Declaration; enhanced international cooperation is imperative to assist the developing countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the area of poverty eradication.

Mr. Chairman,

The World Summit on Social Development in 1995 had recognised the need for an enabling environment for social development. The international community

has since then agreed on the need to enhance the flow of resources from developed to developing countries. As we approach the tenth anniversary of the World Summit on Social Development, there is an urgent need to take stock of the situation - have we done what we agreed was necessary to remove the boundaries of social inequity, or have we travelled from conference to conference, agreeing again and again on the need for poverty eradication and social integration, but without faithful and effective implementation of obligations and commitments in their outcomes by each of the participants ? It is time that our agreements show results, Mr. Chairman. And for this, my delegation urges our development partners to contribute more actively towards achieving the goals of the Copenhagen Declaration and successive conferences and summits on the social development agenda.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS