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**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. STUART W. LESLIE, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF BELIZE TO THE UNITED NATIONS ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN
COMMUNITY (CARICOM) AT HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE SUBSTANTIVE
SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL 2004
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Madam Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 13 Member States of the Caribbean Community that are members of the United Nations. It is on all our behalf that I express our appreciation for the reports on the Economic and Social Council for 2004.

Caricom welcomes the ongoing dialogue and initiatives to use innovative approaches to policy development and coordination which will help to improve the Council's work. We realize however, that much effort is still required to translate the results of the Council's efforts into the promotion of coordination within the United Nations system.

The Secretary-General reported that poverty in Least Developed Countries is not intractable, but that high levels of investment and sustained economic growth are required to dramatically reduce the levels of extreme poverty in LDCs.

Severe poverty and mass hunger are all-pervasive in most Least Developed Countries, many of whom are witnessing an upward trend in extreme poverty, particularly in those LDCs that are dependent on one or a few primary commodity exports for their economic and social well-being. Such indications confirm that today's globalization is reinforcing this "vicious circle of poverty" instead of reducing it.

Equally disconcerting is the fact that this continues to occur as the world economy starts to show signs of recovery. Recent economic reports indicate that the world economy is currently growing at the strongest pace since 2000 and could grow upwards of 3.5 percent next year. Poverty eradication requires more than economic growth. Least Developed Countries should not be slipping further into poverty; appropriate means must be found to ensure that economic growth is also translated into poverty eradication.

When we consider the tremendous efforts made by many LDCs over the past 15 years to implement ambitious economic reforms, even under severe macroeconomic difficulties, then we should be discouraged by the Secretary General's report that severe poverty and mass hunger continues to be all pervasive in most LDCs.

Madam Chair,

The painstaking analyses in the 2003 Human Development Report, which focus on the Millennium Development Goals, outline the real story of globalization. The report illustrates that many developing countries continue to slip further behind acceptable levels of living standards. The report highlights that in almost one-third of the number of developing countries living standards deteriorated significantly to where one in three children die before reaching their fifth birthday. It is also frightening to note from the report that the Human Development Index in 21 countries in value terms have fallen dramatically since the report was first published in 1990. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the state of development in the 1990's and as we move forward in addressing the Millennium Development Goals, we hope that the message is being heard.

Many analysts share the view that given the existing gaps between those who have in abundance and others who have nothing, it will take about 120 years for many poor countries to attain universal primary education; 140 years to cut extreme poverty in half and 200 years to attain the goal of sanitation for all.

Clearly, hope is in short supply! The challenges facing developing countries are deep and require the full commitment and solidarity of all partners. There is no scope for finger pointing. We need permanent and lasting solutions to this "vicious circle of poverty".

Yesterday we heard many speakers who seem to agree that the way forward requires strong political leadership, commitment and financial resources if we are to attain the level progress advocated in the Brussels Plan of Action and the Millennium Development Goals. The link between the Brussels Plan of Action, the Millennium Development Goals, and in the case of Africa, NEPAD, should be strongly emphasized and the synergies between these goals fully addressed by the international community. A number of immediate steps are urgently required on the part of the international community to fully address the mobilization of resources and facilitate an enabling environment, they include:

- the expansion of debt relief in the current Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) whose debt payments still exceeds 2 per cent of GNP, to ensure that budgetary burdens remain manageable;
- the development of a safeguard for HIPCs to ensure that they not return to unsustainable debt levels caused by circumstances beyond their control such as droughts, floods, other natural disasters, or a collapse of commodity export prices.
- donor country partners who have not honored their 0.7% GNP commitments should do so. This should be complemented by releasing ODA to developing countries.
- In trade, OECD members should be transparent and demonstrate the good governance necessary to guarantee a 'level playing field' for all trading partners.

The current status quo and widening gap between developing and developed represents a bleak future for all of us. Progress requires all partners to focus on the enlargement of our moral sensitivities. Success in eradicating poverty requires strong support for values other than pure economic growth; it requires justice and fairness as well as the awareness that we share a common destiny.

As noted by the World Bank President in response to a poll commissioned by the Bank in 2003, of 2600 opinion leaders in 48 countries, it is “the belief of many in the development community, including the World Bank, that if nothing is done about fighting grinding poverty, then lasting peace and stability are but a distant dream.”

We in CARICOM know and we want you to know that to succeed, indeed to survive, we must match the immensity of the challenge we face with clearly focused, **substantial commitment, sustained attention and deliberate action.**

Thank you.