

Forty-fifth session of the Commission for Social Development

Statement by Johan Schölvinnck, Director Division for Social Policy and Development, DESA

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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies
Distinguished delegates,

I have the honour to introduce agenda item 3 entitled “Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly”.

There are three reports that have been submitted for this item. I would like to draw your attention first to item 3(a), which is the priority theme entitled “Promoting full employment and decent work for all”, and the eponymous report of the Secretary-General, contained in document E/CN.5/2007/2. The report focuses overall on key developments and trends in employment and decent work over the past decade, and their impact on poverty eradication and social integration.

Despite growing economic output, the report notes that overall unemployment increased over the decade, with the most notable increases in sub-Saharan Africa and Asian countries still experiencing the consequences of the 1997 Asian crisis. The relative size of various economic sectors has also shifted: while the industrial sector remains about the same, agriculture has declined and the service sector has grown. Another important trend has been the movement of people and jobs both internally and across borders. In all, employment has become less secure: there is more informal employment, self employment and short term contractual employment, and a competitive global market place has left even formal employment workplaces with fewer benefits.

On its link to poverty eradication, the report finds that some of the major economic trends are contributing to road blocks to reduce poverty. There is mounting evidence that economic growth is less effective in reducing poverty when inequality is on the rise. Also, trade liberalization in the absence of other policies does not necessarily lead to higher growth and may in fact decrease welfare in the short term. Even though poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) have become the key national road map for poverty reduction in many countries, few PRSPs address employment issues and social protection policies directly.

On its link to social integration, the report finds that in many respects the world is less integrated than it was in 1995. Older persons and youth, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities suffer disproportionately from negative trends in employment such as flexible labour markets, short term/contractual agreements and the overall increase in employment insecurity. And, despite the attention given to women’s status in employment,

women's earnings are substantially lower than men's and men and women remain largely segregated in the workforce.

Finally, the concept of decent work for all, which includes the provision of a sufficient level of income, labour security, good working conditions and a voice at work, has yet to be turned into reality. The findings of this review suggest that the mandate of the World Summit, to create a world of decent work and full employment as a crucial path to poverty reduction and social integration, remains an unfulfilled global challenge.

Mr. Chairman,

I would now like to turn to agenda item 3(b) entitled "Review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups". There are two Reports of the Secretary-General under this item, the first related to the issue of ageing, entitled "Major developments in the area of ageing since the Second World Assembly on Ageing", contained in document E/CN.5/2007/7.

Almost five years have passed since the 2002 Second World Assembly on Ageing and adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. During this time Governments have introduced a wide range of policy measures aimed at addressing various challenges stemming from population ageing. The report submitted for your consideration highlights major developments in this area at the global and regional levels. It is hoped that the analysis contained in this report will facilitate your deliberations on the challenges and opportunities of ageing in the context of the first review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid Plan.

The basic premise of the report is that population ageing represents a major social achievement and manifestation of progress. People live longer than ever, and continue to contribute to society in various areas. This major achievement, however, is inseparable from numerous challenges — from increasing demand for health care and care services, to growing concerns over pension liabilities and the apparent need to develop sustainable social protection schemes for older persons.

Active participation of older persons in society is impossible without protecting their rights and fighting against age-based discrimination on the one hand, and concerted efforts geared at empowerment of older persons on the other. Much more remains to be done to counter the existing negative perceptions regarding older persons, which are often based on distorted or biased information. In this connection, older persons are expected to take an active part in the first cycle of the review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action through the participatory bottom up approach approved by the Commission for Social Development.

I would also like to add that the Commission, at its last session in 2006, took note with appreciation of the draft guidelines proposed by the Secretary-General for the review and appraisal process, and requested that they be made available in all official languages of the United Nations (resolution 44/1, op. 9). The Guidelines in English – which will be

made available to you on Monday – came out of press before the current session of the Commission, and their production in other five languages will be completed in a few months.

Mr. Chairman,

The next report also under this item is contained in document A/62/61-E/2007/7, entitled “Follow-up to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond”. This report presents a review of the progress made and the constraints that young people face in relation to their participation in the global economy.

It covers not only employment, but also highlights issues pertinent to globalization, education, poverty and hunger – all critical determinants of the availability of decent work and sustained livelihoods for youth.

The present cohort of youth has numerous advantages as well as assets, but it also faces a complex and rapidly evolving economic and social environment where new opportunities co-exist with major constraints and obstacles. Youth often lack the requisite experience, knowledge and skills to adapt to a new and rapidly changing environment. The enhanced opportunities for youth to participate in the global economy created by globalization co-exist with increased unemployment, as well as job flexibility and casualization, which have sometimes exacerbated their exclusion, creating additional challenges of alienation and delinquency.

In response to the General Assembly resolution 60/2, the report proposes indicators for measuring youth development. In collaboration with relevant UN programmes and agencies, the Secretariat established a broad set of indicators for measuring progress towards implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth. This is a first step in a long road to establish data on a set of quantifiable core indicators that could enable stakeholders to measure youth development over time and compare progress within and between countries and regions. The report also puts forward some specific recommendations geared to integrating and protecting youth in the global economy.

I would like to mention before closing, that the Commission is scheduled to take up agenda item 3 (c) next Tuesday, 13 February. At that time I will present the Note by the Secretariat on “Youth employment: impact, challenges and opportunities for social development”, contained in document E/CN.5/2007/3, which has been prepared to facilitate consideration of this item.

Thank you.