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**Statement by
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TO THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
New York, 6 February 2008**

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This session of the Commission for Social Development focuses on policy options and practical measures to bring us closer to the goal of full and productive employment and decent work for all.

In her statement, the Deputy Secretary-General has eloquently explained the critical importance of employment to the United Nations Development Agenda, including the MDGs, with their overarching goal of cutting extreme poverty.

Yet, looking at the employment situation in both developing and developed countries, we see a number of worrisome trends. Macroeconomic and social policies have not succeeded in generating adequate employment for citizens.

Globally, despite robust rates of economic growth, employment creation is not keeping up with the growth of the working age population. From 1996 to 2006, global GDP grew by 3.8 per cent per year. Yet, during the same decade, the unemployment rate remained unchanged, at around 6 per cent.

Meanwhile, employment conditions are getting worse, as the world confronts serious challenges in the labour market. There is greater economic insecurity for most workers. Rates of unemployment are still high in many developing countries. Underemployment persists, and the informalization of the economy continues.

In an ever more globalized world, workers with low education and low skills have been hit especially hard by these trends, which include increasing income inequalities. Social exclusion of certain groups has subjected them to the real-life consequences of higher rates of both unemployment and underemployment. This is especially true for women and youth, but also for older workers, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and migrants.

Therefore, your deliberations on promoting full employment and decent work, during this policy session, are highly relevant to the lives of people around the world.

Distinguished delegates,

Your discussion on youth will feed directly into these deliberations.

Around the world, youth are three times as likely to be unemployed as are adults. This situation has been unchanged over the last ten years.

The recently published World Youth Report 2007, *Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges*, points up the difficulties for young people, in all regions of the world, in making the transition from school to decent work.

These difficulties result not only from a lack of jobs, but also from the gap between the skills acquired at school and those demanded by labour markets in a globalized economy. Therefore, we need not only macroeconomic policies to create jobs, but also improved social policies in the areas of education and health, as well as access to ICT.

The Commission's discussion on this front will surely benefit from the presence here of young people and youth-led organizations. Please do not be shy. Tell us about your experiences and your ideas for tackling youth unemployment and underemployment, so that all young men and women have an equal chance to find decent work.

Distinguished delegates,

As we discuss productive employment and decent work for all, we must not overlook discrimination of older persons, which remains wide-spread across countries – particularly in the labour market.

This session of the Commission will conclude the first cycle of review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The Madrid Plan, adopted in 2002, has done much to raise global awareness about the role of older persons in development and the need to align development with the facts of population ageing.

Last year, regional reviews of the Plan's implementation highlighted the importance of integrating the concerns of older persons into national agendas.

In my view, we have fallen far short when it comes to realizing the great opportunity that population ageing presents for development. We need to redouble our efforts to bring the vision of the Madrid Plan to life.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am heartened to see that the Commission will take up, as its emerging issue item, the mainstreaming of disabilities issues into the development agenda.

It will be extremely difficult to cut poverty in half by 2015 unless the approximately 650 million persons with disabilities are brought into the development mainstream. This, in turn, will require removing the barriers they encounter to employment and decent work.

Unemployment rates of persons with disabilities are usually double that of the general population, and in some cases as high as 80 per cent or more.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the right of such persons to work and employment on an equal basis with others, in a “work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible”. And it provides a framework for creating national policies and practices that are inclusive of persons with disabilities.

Now it is time to put the Convention to work. I am confident that we will see the entry into force of the Convention within the next few months. And then all stakeholders must mobilize efforts for its implementation.

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The 2005 World Summit represented a milestone on the path to “Society for All”, with its strong focus on implementation of all the internationally agreed development goals – including full and productive employment and decent work for all.

The Summit Outcome underscored that employment creation should be approached as an objective of national and international economic and social policy, not a by-product. ECOSOC’s 2006 Ministerial Declaration reinforced this reorientation towards the goal of productive employment and decent work.

The Commission for Social Development now has a critical opportunity to catalyze the translation of this global commitment into national development strategies, by generating action-oriented policy recommendations.

It is incumbent on you to ensure that follow-up actions on employment continue in the UN intergovernmental process after the closing of this session.

With the Council’s adoption of a multi-year work programme, and its new functions assigned by the 2005 Summit, the Commission and its counterparts are now in a much better position to contribute to the Council’s work; to strengthen implementation of their own outcomes; and to enhance the collective impact of the entire ECOSOC system.

I urge you to make the most of this new situation.

This year, for example, ECOSOC’s Annual Ministerial Review of progress in implementing the development goals will focus on commitments in the area of sustainable

development, with its economic, social and environmental dimensions. Next year, the focus will be global health commitments.

At the same time, the Commission can help shape the United Nations response to emerging issues, in a way that strategically advances implementation of the broader development agenda.

For instance, as noted in the Declaration produced by yesterday's Civil Society Forum on "decent work for a decent life", the global challenge of climate change has a social – and an employment – dimension, including opportunities for creating jobs, especially for vulnerable groups. The same is true for international migration and other new and emerging issues.

In its efforts to promote employment and decent work, and its own wider work on social development, this Commission has a very important role to play in strengthening the development pillar of the United Nations.

It is the honour of my Department, DESA, to serve and assist you in this endeavour. Be assured that we will continue to do so with our utmost energy and determination.

Thank you.