His Excellency Mr. Néstor Osorio,
The President of Economic and Social Council,
Mr. Hongbo Wu,
Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a distinct honour for me to serve as Chair of this 51st session of the Commission for Social Development and I welcome you. I extend a special welcome to those who have travelled to join us, in particular, Ministers, senior Government officials, delegates from capitals, representative from civil society and participants from the entities of the UN system. Greetings to you all!

The Commission for Social Development has been in existence from the very inception of the United Nations, advising the Economic and Social Council and Governments on a wide range of social policy issues and on
the social perspectives of development. The Commission focuses on the issues affecting social development that require urgent consideration, and make substantive recommendations thereon through the guidance of Member States in the work of the United Nations and beyond. This distinction is, indeed, appropriate for the Commission charged with ensuring that people are at the centre of development.

Distinguished Delegates,

The year 2013 is particularly crucial for the Commission as there are several intergovernmental processes going on simultaneously, including the Post-2015 Development Agenda. In coming sessions, we are going to exchange our views with diverse and rich experiences, highlighting challenges encountered and moving forward through the lessons learned thus far to renew and reinvigorate the commitments made at Copenhagen “to fight poverty, to create productive jobs and to strengthen the social fabric”. There are numerous sessions which will provide opportunities for interactive dialogue with experts from various regions of the world and to focus our deliberations.

As the intergovernmental body responsible for advancing the social development agenda established at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, you are aware that the work before us remains as critical as ever. The objectives of poverty eradication, social integration and full and productive employment continue to be far from reached. As the barriers to the realization of these objectives evolve and adapt, we must do the same.
During this session, members of the Commission will focus attention on the priority theme of “promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all”. As this is the review session in the two-year cycle of the Commission’s work, our deliberations will explore experiences, challenges and effective strategies to promote the empowerment of people in the framework of social development towards informing next year’s policy session. The Commission will also consider various issues relating to persons with disabilities, youth, older persons, indigenous persons and the family, as well as examine the emerging issue of “the social dimension in the global development agenda beyond 2015”.

In addition to a high-level panel discussion on the priority theme and a panel dedicated to the emerging issue, we will further participate in a high-level panel discussion on the report of the Secretary-General on the Second Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, as well as a panel discussion on the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth: United Nations system coordination and collaboration related to youth.

In turning to the priority theme, the Commission can be guided by the insight contained in the Copenhagen Declaration, which affirmed that, “the most productive policies and investments are those that empower people to maximize their capacities, resources and opportunities”. In deciding on the priority theme, the Economic and Social Council recognized that achievement of the core social development objectives
relies on the empowerment of people. At the same time, empowerment is fostered by those same objectives.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Commission has before it the exciting challenge of deliberating on the issue of empowerment of people for the first time in its history. In preparation for this task, the Secretariat convened an expert group meeting on the priority theme. That meeting served to articulate the concept of empowerment and to outline an enabling environment for it. It also explored the relationship between empowerment and individuals and social groups, and contributed recommendations for the Commission’s consideration. In particular, the experts suggested that governance and information and communication technologies (ICTs) are increasingly relevant to empowerment and may be further explored by the Commission. The outcomes of the expert group meeting were incorporated into the Secretary-General’s report on the topic. I look forward to your views on its contents.

Throughout your deliberations, I encourage you to bear in mind how the Commission’s thinking and outputs can contribute to the formulation of the global development agenda beyond 2015. In this regard, the session’s emerging issue has special relevance. During the forthcoming panel on the topic, we will address ways to effectively integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. We will also discuss how the post-2015 global
development agenda can best contribute to promoting such integration and to achieving socially sustainable development. During this 51st session, you have the opportunity to lay new groundwork for the foundation of social development in reviewing its linkages to the empowerment of people.

Many Member states, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations are organizing side events that will further enrich our deliberations. I thank them all for their efforts to make this session more vibrant.

Before I conclude, I would like to remind you of our time limitations and encourage you to keep your interventions within given time limits since we have a very long list of speakers. I look forward to a constructive engagement, productive discussions, and a fruitful outcome so that we can continue our work with renewed determination to build a strong social pillar as envisioned in the outcome document, the Future We Want.

I thank you.