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**Introductory remarks by  
MR. SHA ZUKANG  
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
TO THE SECOND COMMITTEE SIDE EVENT ON THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS  
DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY, 2008-2017  
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It is an honour for me to moderate this distinguished panel, and a great pleasure to welcome all of you. The Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, from 2008 to 2017, was proclaimed by the General Assembly at its 62<sup>nd</sup> session. The aim is to support the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals related to poverty eradication, including the Millennium Development Goals.

At last month's High-level Event on the MDGs, world leaders from government, civil society and the private sector joined forces. And they committed to urgent actions to accelerate progress towards the MDGs, with their overarching goal of poverty reduction. They also recognized that this would require action across the broader development agenda, including to address the new challenges.

Tackling poverty has become even more imperative as the global financial crisis jeopardizes economic growth and the development gains made so far. The threats of increasing unemployment, the high cost of food and energy, failing social protection systems, and reduced access to credit and financial services are more palpable than ever.

We face the prospect of a global economic downturn, with particular concern for the implications for developing countries. In Africa, growth could fall below the rate of population increase. The economies in Latin America could come to a standstill. And even the fast-growing Asian countries could suffer serious blows. All this would come on top of the high food and energy prices which the people of these countries, and especially the poorest amongst them, have suffered recently.

Even if the coordinated bailout packages help to restore market confidence, it will take time before economic activity will resume. If, on the other hand, the situation continues to deteriorate, the progress towards the MDGs could be put at great risk. Environmental deterioration – from climate change to loss of biodiversity, deforestation and scarcity of water resources – poses additional challenges, which fall hardest on those who are most in need.

During the First Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, we succeeded in putting poverty at the forefront of the global development agenda. Yet, the progress was uneven, with most of the gains made in China. In sub-Saharan Africa, there are 100 million more poor people today

than in 1990. And around the world, women and children are still disproportionately affected by poverty, as are other disadvantaged groups.

With this Second Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, we have an opportunity to build on current poverty reduction strategies – and to strengthen an integrated socio-economic policy framework for development focused on rooting out the causes of poverty.

To make the Second Decade an effective catalyst in reducing poverty globally, we need to identify priority areas for action. This brings us to the purpose of today's panel, to start the dialogue on the potential and priority areas of the Second Decade. The panel will focus in particular on three areas that are critical to poverty eradication: productive employment and decent work; social protection; and the development of inclusive financial institutions.

First, successful experiences show that productive employment and decent work are critical pathways to long-term poverty reduction, especially for women. Yet, we have not seen adequate growth in employment despite rapid economic growth in the past years. Moreover, there are about 500 million working poor who hold jobs that do not pay enough to lift them and their families out of extreme poverty. And now we face the prospect of a global economic downturn. What are we missing here? How can we expand and improve opportunities for productive employment and decent work for all? How do we improve productivity in rural areas especially, given past neglect of agricultural investment?

Second, social protection is integral to poverty reduction, in order to alleviate the situation of the poor – and to help the near poor avoid falling into poverty when faced with loss of income, health and other emergencies. Income support helps to keep children in school and to enable access to basic healthcare – both major focuses of the recent High-level Event on MDGs. Ensuring basic economic security for all, in the face of growing job insecurity, and in this era of globalization, should be an integral part of every poverty reduction strategy. Is basic social protection affordable in poor countries? What are some of the practical challenges countries face?

Third, reducing poverty requires sustained economic growth, which is facilitated by a well functioning financial system. Much more effort should be made in developing inclusive financial institutions that offer affordable financial products and services, including microfinance, to all segments of society. Microfinance has helped the poor, especially women, through self-employment, increased income and empowerment. However, its current contribution appears to lie mostly in improving the day-to-day lives of the poor, rather than serving as a sustainable pathway out of poverty. How can we scale up the impact of microfinance? What are the main challenges to developing inclusive financial institutions in support of poverty reduction?

Our discussions today on the Second Decade will help the United Nations General Assembly set the agenda for poverty eradication for the rest of the MDG timeframe and beyond. We are fortunate to have here a panel of distinguished speakers to share their insights and perspectives.