

**Statement by Mr. José Antonio Ocampo  
Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs  
to the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission for Social Development**

**4 February 2004**

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address the Commission for Social Development for the first time in my capacity as Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

The Commission, which has a long and distinguished history dating back to its creation in 1946, was given a renewed mandate and comprehensive normative framework by the World Summit for Social Development convened in Copenhagen in 1995. While social issues may have changed significantly over time, the social problems the world is facing today are certainly no less serious than they were a decade ago. Consequently the difficulties in addressing social issues in an international context remain acute. This Commission is in a unique position to stimulate and strengthen international cooperation on issues such as the persistence of poverty, the worsening of inequalities, the problems of social cohesion and social integration that exist in various parts of the world. The Commission is also one of the intergovernmental bodies that has the ability, if not the duty, to promote the coherence of and links between economic and social policies. These tasks are particularly timely in the context of your next year's priority theme on "Review of further implementation of the Social Summit and the outcome of the 24<sup>th</sup> special session of the General Assembly", a review that coincides with the tenth anniversary of the Social Summit.

I also note with interest that the Commission has included in its agenda an item on "Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting social development", under which you will be considering the issue of "international migration and migrants from a social perspective." By introducing flexibility in your agenda you will increasingly be better placed to take up issues that call for urgent actions. This approach will also no doubt enhance the effectiveness of the Commission as well as its impact on the rest of the Organisation.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me turn to the priority theme of this session, "Improving public sector effectiveness".

Improving public sector effectiveness, especially in the context of your Commission, should be seen within the framework of the implementation of major social objectives, notably social justice and participation. It should be seen particularly as the locus of policy making where efforts to integrate social and economic objectives and measures have to be truly realized. By integration, I do *not* mean the traditional subordination of “social” to “economic” considerations. Here I would like to recall the keynote address I gave before your Commission two years ago in February 2002 when you considered the priority theme of “Integration of social and economic policy”. At that occasion, I stated that “economic development makes sense to the extent that it promotes welfare and social integration.” I also said that “a commitment to reduce poverty, eliminate extreme poverty, and enhance equity and social integration requires persistent actions to reconcile economic growth, employment generation and an active social policy, within a consistent macroeconomic framework.” Clearly integrating social objectives into economic policy making is key to achieving inclusive development.

Activities of the public sector, notably the delivery of public social services, should be geared towards reaching every individual in a given society, including the poor and the weak. One should never lose sight of this when seeking to evaluate and assess the effectiveness and efficiency of such services. Also, one should always remember that the effective delivery of public services is not only necessary for equity, equality, a good functioning of society and strengthening of the social fabric; it is also an indispensable condition for economic development. Unfortunately, the provision of social services continues to be regarded by many as a “luxury”, or as an expenditure, rather than as an investment in improving the human condition.

The ultimate objective of improving public sector effectiveness is the overall improvement in people’s lives. A well-functioning public sector will play an important role in attaining the goals and objectives set out in the major United Nations international conferences and summits including the goals and objectives set out in the Millennium Declaration. Economic growth, although indispensable, will not be enough. It is the content of that growth, especially its distributional and equity aspects, that is important. Here the public sector will have an important role to play in order to achieve high quality economic growth.

When examining the effectiveness of the public sector, the role of the private sector inevitably comes to the fore. The respective roles and responsibilities of the public and private sectors on policies and methods of efficient delivery of public services urgently need to be reviewed, reassessed and

reconsidered. However, whatever modalities are adopted, it should be clear that the fundamental objectives which underpin the *raison d'être* of the public sector remain unchanged and that, therefore, the ultimate responsibility for the delivery of public services rests with the State.

Improvement of the effectiveness of the public sector is not only a national task and obligation. It also requires strengthened international cooperation, through, for example, cooperation among countries and regions, and through the work of the UN regional commissions, agencies and the multilateral financial institutions. The Commission for Social Development has a vital role to play by serving as the forum for exchange of experience and elaboration of norms on this very important subject. I trust that the outcome of your deliberations will make a major contribution to this endeavour.

Mr. Chairman,

It is clear from your agenda that your Commission deals with a wide range of mandates. Besides the priority theme, the Commission this year also deals with three crucial social issues directly related to social integration namely disability, ageing and family.

Let me first turn to the issue of family. This year we observe the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, which was celebrated in 1994 to strengthen and support families in performing their societal and developmental functions and to build upon these strengths, in particular at the national and local levels.

The family is an ancient institution, but it is also an evolving and changing institution. It is important is to move away from a focus on what a family *is*, to a focus on what a family *does*. Each of us comes from a family. Our families offer us a unit for providing mutual support, pooling resources and sharing burdens, and giving and receiving emotional encouragement and affection. We all have a need for affiliation, for relationships, for sharing our lives with others, and families – whether single-person, nuclear, extended or composite – are the means for achieving this affiliation.

The observance of the tenth anniversary provides an opportunity to give new attention to the role of families in our societies, and to give added impetus to policies and programmes to support family functions.

Mr. Chairman,

Although not directly related to the work of the Commission, I cannot refrain from mentioning my deep satisfaction with the positive outcome, some two weeks ago, of the Working Group established to draft a text of an international convention on the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. The fact that the Working Group was able to prepare and adopt *ad referendum* a draft convention to serve as a basis for negotiation for the General Assembly Ad Hoc Committee, bodes well for this extremely important negotiating process. In the not too distant future, we may well see a comprehensive international document dealing with rights of persons with disabilities. I would like to commend representatives of the Member States and the civil society for a highly constructive dialogue they conducted and for the encouraging outcomes achieved. The drafting process was particularly successful due to the richness and openness of the debate among representatives of Governments, leaders of organizations of persons with disabilities and human rights specialists. All of this augurs well for your debate under the agenda item on equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities, especially as you examine the relationship between the Standard Rules, its Supplement and the preparations towards the Convention.

Mr. Chairman,

The implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing is another important issue before the Commission. Reaching agreement on the modalities for the review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan is essential for its implementation. Here I wish to recall that at your last session in February 2003, the Commission endorsed the bottom-up approach to the review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan. Following that endorsement we have proceeded to elaborate the content of the review and appraisal exercise to be applied at the local and national level. We mobilized our own expertise and that of international experts to clarify important dimensions of national implementation strategies and the key components of the bottom-up participatory approach. In our view, the time has come to start translating discourse into action: it is necessary that the participatory approach for the review and appraisal of Madrid be adopted by Governments, in line with their specific national circumstances. Equally important for the Commission is to decide on the format and periodicity of the *global* review and appraisal exercise. The Madrid Conference emphasized that ageing was a "silent revolution" with monumental consequences over the coming decades. It is up to this Commission, by its actions and decisions, to break this silence.

Mr. Chairman,

I have not dwelled upon the various reports before the Commission. My colleague Mr. Johan Schölvinnck, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development, will introduce the Secretary-General's reports on the various subject matters in a more detailed manner. Let me conclude by saying that this Commission, whose very existence, not long ago, was called into question, has been much invigorated. This is not only evident through the content of your agenda, but also by the keen interest of civil society, especially NGOs, in your work. The number of side events organized during the course of the Commission attests to that. I wish you every success in your deliberations and look forward to the outcomes of your work.

