

08/10/2003



Press Release GA/SHC/3739

Fifty-eighth General Assembly
Third Committee
6th Meeting (AM)

AFRICAN COUNTRIES STRESS NEGATIVE IMPACT OF CONFLICTS, POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT, AIDS

ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, AS THIRD COMMITTEE CONCLUDES DEBATE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

Difficulties faced in achieving social development in the midst of conflicts, poverty, unemployment, and HIV/AIDS, as well as in the current international economic environment, were stressed by several African delegations today as the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, Cultural) concluded its consideration of social development.

The “dismal” statistics associated with social development, particularly in the Third World, indicated that extreme poverty, lack of clean water, environmental degradation, illiteracy, and infectious diseases, might in fact be increasing, said the representative of Eritrea. Social development could only take place in a safe environment free of conflict.

He added that any effort to ensure global social development must benefit from a balanced blend of domestic programmes emphasizing the centrality of education, especially of the marginalized members of society and meaningfully supportive international assistance in the area of poverty eradication.

The representative of the Congo said his country had also been affected by recurring conflicts that had undermined development efforts, affected the living conditions of vulnerable groups and created mass unemployment. Today, the Government attached high priority to youth employment, the rehabilitation of ex-combatants, and fighting HIV/AIDS, but it needed the assistance of the international community to realize the Millennium Development Goals.

The representative of the United Republic of Tanzania said his Government was planning to host a regional workshop in October that would explore the nexus between ageing and poverty, identifying measures to address that relationship in the achievement of Millennium Development Goals. That was especially important in an era when grandparents were becoming parents due to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS

— a burden had fallen largely on older women.

Developing countries were poor, with huge populations living in abject poverty, said the representative of Kenya. Left alone, they might not be able to bring about substantial economic and social progress in their societies. Developing countries could only achieve their full potential if there was a level playing field in international trade on which they were allowed to protect their interests, address their concerns and reap the attendant benefits. Trade was a tool for development, and potentially the most effective one.

Developing countries had expressed their concerns on trade time and time again, said the representative of Cameroon. Developed countries must live up to their commitments concerning trade, debt relief and official development assistance. The Millennium Summit had confirmed the commitment of leaders of the world to fight poverty, and a consensus had emerged on reforming the trade system of the new international order. It was time to deliver. There was a need for concerted action on the national and international levels in order to offset the negative impact of globalization on social development.

Over the last two days of discussion on social development, delegations stressed the need to balance social and economic policies, both nationally and internationally, in order to achieve social development. It had also been stressed that social development must include the most vulnerable groups, such as youth, older persons and persons with disabilities. Many delegations highlighted their important roles in the development process. Delegations also stressed the need for the international community to support the family unit as an agent for development.

Also speaking this afternoon were representatives of Morocco, Nigeria, Malawi, Guyana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Mongolia, Mali, Thailand, Pakistan, Nepal and Suriname.

The representatives of Israel and Syria spoke in exercise of the right of reply. The Observer for Palestine also exercised its right to reply.

Representatives of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference also spoke this morning.

The Committee will reconvene tomorrow at 3 p.m. to begin consideration of items related to crime prevention and international drug control.

Background

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, Cultural) is expected to conclude its consideration of social development this morning. Under the umbrella of social development, the Committee will consider issues related to youth, older persons, disabled persons, and issues related to the family.

For further background information, please see Press Releases GA/SHC/3737 and 3738 of 6 and 7 October, respectively.

AUGUSTINE MAHIGA (United Republic of Tanzania) said most of the goals of the World Summit for Social Development continued to be elusive, and many of the targets set at major United Nations conferences had not been met. He stressed that the social development of developing countries required their involvement in international decision-making processes, noting that thus far multilateralism had only been marginally extended to the economic realm. It was hoped the process of globalization could be more inclusive and equitable by addressing the needs of those who had been marginalized.

Turning to the issue of ageing and social development, he said the Government of Tanzania had developed a national policy on ageing that recognized the worth of older persons as important resources for the nation. It had drawn up laws to promote the well-being and rights of older persons.

The Government also planned to host a regional workshop in October that would explore the nexus between ageing and poverty, with the aim of identifying measures to address that relationship in the achievement of Millennium Development Goals. He said the workshop was especially important in an era when grandparents were becoming parents, due to prevalence of HIV/AIDS, when parents died and left their children in the care of grandparents. That burden had fallen largely on older women, and it was therefore critical to mainstream a gender perspective in policies on ageing.

MEHIEDDINE EL KADIRI (Morocco) said that the World Summit for Social Development had been a positive turning point to fight poverty, increase education levels and prevent the spreading of disease. The international community must, however, exert all efforts to ensure that the commitments made and goals were fulfilled. The Government of Morocco had established a comprehensive national policy aimed at eradicating poverty, combating illiteracy and providing social services, and the 20/20 initiative, adopted in Copenhagen, had been implemented in Morocco.

A national report of the social services, based on the 20/20 initiative, had been completed, he said. The report examined how aid was used in order to promote national social development. A national agency had been created to revive the social and economic situations of both the northern and southern sectors of the country.

Regarding disabled persons, he said, the Government had implemented a programme of action in cooperation with civil society, to eradicate all discrimination based on disabilities. It had also undertaken actions to promote the participation of youth in decision-making, as youth embodied the values of peace and development. A national institutional mechanism towards an international forum for youth was also underway. He stressed the responsibility of the international community to cooperate and assist developing countries in efforts to eradicate poverty.

ADEKUNBI ABIBAT SONAIKE (Nigeria) said that despite the efforts made and the modest success achieved in the area of economic and social development, the vast majority of developing countries were still faced with the problem of inequalities in income distribution, credit access, education, adequate employment, health, nutrition, poor infrastructure and the lack of effective networks for social protection. As trade liberalization affected developing countries, it also impacted most negatively on the family, deepening family and individual poverty, she continued. Concerning the family, Nigeria recognized the important role of the family as the basic unit of society, and that it played an indispensable role in the development of the State. Therefore, it was imperative that one continued to value and demonstrate considerable respect for the family, its rights and well-being, as well as its responsibilities and constructive contributions to the process of peace and development.

It was necessary for policies to be formulated in support of parents and caregivers as heads of families to carry out their child-rearing responsibilities most effectively, she said. That role was being threatened by chronic poverty, especially in developing and least developed countries. It was important to promote investment in the positive growth of the family through micro-credit facilities and vocational training to support economic activities.

CATHERINE OTITI (Uganda) said her Government was committed to actively participate as a member of the ad hoc committee on an international convention on persons with disabilities to chart a course for a convention to protect the rights of disabled persons.

She said Uganda had made progress in its efforts to eradicate poverty. Primary education was free and compulsory and had led to high enrolment figures and an increase in the youth literacy rate to over 80 per cent. Gender equality was being promoted both in schools and in the political sphere and had resulted in more than 87 per cent literacy among young women and more than 25 per cent of seats in the national parliament held by women.

On HIV/AIDS, she said that the fight against HIV/AIDS and other diseases was inextricably linked to social development in sub-Saharan Africa. Uganda had taken a multifaceted approach to the problem, but substantial assistance was still required for community support, increased access to treatment, and the promotion of prevention measures.

RENE NSEMI (Congo) said that almost 10 years after the World Summit on Social Development, the initial reasons for its convening remained the same. The world social situation was still characterized

by persisting and even widening gaps between rich and poor countries. The poor were the most vulnerable to economic shocks and natural disasters, conflicts and scourges such as HIV/AIDS. The Congo had been affected by recurring conflicts that had undermined development efforts. Those repeated crises had affected living conditions and created levels of mass unemployment. The Government had developed a detailed policy for the next few years, which attached high priority to youth employment. Projects were also underway to rehabilitate ex-combatants.

Another challenge for the Government was the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, he said. A national council had been established to combat HIV/AIDS under the aegis of the head of State. The international community was urged to assist those efforts in order to allow the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. The Congo was determined to work with the international community and the United Nations to achieve the goals set at the World Summit on Social Development.

ISAAC LAMBA (Malawi) said his government placed the eradication of poverty at the centre of its development agenda, also the needs and contributions of all members of society must be considered in the formulation and implementation of national development policies, and most important was the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in development strategies. Malawi's poverty reduction programmes had targeted vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic, along with limited institutional and financial resources, had posed additional challenges to the attainment of development goals, he said.

Social development must be fully integrated into economic development, with priority given to the needs of people, he continued. In that regard, ageing in Africa was an emerging issue that required further examination if his country was to make progress in mainstreaming the needs of elderly people. The Government of Malawi also fully supported a convention to promote and protect the rights of disabled people. The needs of families must also be effectively addressed, as the family was the backbone of society.

DONNETTE CRITCHLOW (Guyana) said that although international assistance had been forthcoming in the fight to eradicate poverty in Guyana, efforts had been constrained by the international economic environment. As a heavily indebted country, Guyana had been able to secure some assistance towards the reduction of the debt-servicing burden. Nevertheless, resources were insufficient to meet the needs of the social sector, particularly as it related to education, health and housing. The worsening of the terms of international trade, coupled with the failure of some developed countries to fulfil their commitment to ensure that 0.7 per cent of their gross national product was channelled towards the development needs of developing countries, translated into an insufficient and unstable supply of finances for development. That situation must be remedied.

It was also imperative that developing countries were involved in and participated fully and effectively in the decision-making of international financial forums, whose policies and decisions had a profound impact on people — making them democratic, transparent and accountable. Social development could not be achieved in conditions of economic instability, and, conversely, economic development could not be attained where there were conflicts, chaos and marginalization. Unless an enabling environment was established and concerted action taken at the national levels, the established goals of the World Summit would no longer be attainable.

GERENGBO YAKIVU (Democratic Republic of the Congo), highlighting the task of poverty reduction as an integral part of development, called on the international community to assist her country in rebuilding the socio-economic infrastructure destroyed by six years of war.

She said her country supported the promotion of youth employment in the fight to eradicate poverty, especially in countries that had been ravaged by armed conflict and faced the problem of young

children with nothing to do, street children and orphaned children. Her Government had established mechanisms for re-education and rehabilitation for youth.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo also supported the Madrid Plan of Action to promote the participation of older people in society, and had set up mechanisms to care for them. Similarly, her Government endorsed the implementation of the full participation of disabled people in social life. It had also taken actions to promote the rights of women and children to strengthen family ties.

RANIA AL HA ALI ([Syria](#)) said the issue of social development was of high importance to the Syrian Government. Despite positive measures achieved in social development, much remained to be done. Regrettably there was still a growing gap between developed and developing countries, with increases in poverty and marginalization. It was therefore necessary to increase coherence in development policies and strategies, and to strengthen existing partnerships. The Government in Syria was currently formulating legislation to protect vulnerable factions of society. Policies existed that provided social protection and social services for vulnerable groups in the country, including for disabled persons and older persons.

A current concern for the Government was unemployment, she said. That concern had led to the initiation of many programmes aiming to absorb unemployed persons into the labour markets, including disabled persons. It was also stressed that social development could not be achieved if people's human rights were being denied, particularly so if the right to self-determination was denied. The international community was called upon to act in order to end the current situation of occupation in the Middle East.

AMINA C. MOHAMED ([Kenya](#)) said that in preparing the Kenyan Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, four major principles had been recognized for its success. These were: giving a voice to the poor, participation and ownership, equitable distribution of national resources, and transparency and accountability. Those principles were dictated by the conviction that no Government could, on its own, undertake development without the support of both private and civil society sectors. In formulating the national policies and budgets, the Government worked closely with the private and civil society sectors. Many developing countries were poor, with populations living in abject poverty. Left alone, they might not be able to bring about substantial economic and social progress in their societies.

Kenya regretted the collapse of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference in Cancun in Mexico last month. The collapse was not the only possible option available to members of the WTO — it was the most unpopular option. She hoped that the impasse would not be allowed to gather dust and that talks would resume sooner rather than later. Developing countries could only achieve their full potential if there was a level playing field in international trade on which they were allowed to play to protect their interests, address their concerns and reap the attendant benefits. Trade was a tool for development -- potentially the most effective one.

P. GANSUKH ([Mongolia](#)) said his Government fully supported the integration of social and economic policies recommended by the Commission for Social Development. Social progress could not be achieved under unstable economic conditions, and economic stability could not be sustained in an unstable society. His Government's development strategy therefore gave priority to the creation of an equitable social environment for human development, improvement of the quality of education, and greater access to health and other social services.

Social development was primarily the responsibility of each country but required the participation of the international community, including the support of civil society organizations, corporations, small businesses, and the United Nations system, he concluded.

AMARE TEKLE ([Eritrea](#)) said the dismal statistics associated with social development, particularly in the Third World, indicated that extreme poverty, hunger and famine, lack of adequate and clean water, environmental degradation, illiteracy, infectious diseases, drugs and crimes might, in fact, be

increasing. At the heart of any social development was the concern for human beings, both as individuals and members of groups, in the State as well as in civil society.

One must also not forget that old problems and conflicts had had drastic negative impacts on development, he said. Social development, indeed any development, could take place only in a safe environment free of conflict. Conflicts had not only been a bane on development but had also destroyed what had been achieved in many countries.

Any effort to ensure global social development must benefit from a balanced blend of domestic programs emphasizing the centrality of education, especially of the marginalized members of society, and meaningfully supportive international assistance in the area of poverty eradication, he concluded.

CHEICK SIDI DIARRA (Mali) said his country relied on agriculture as the driving force for its economic and social development, with more than 70 per cent of the population living in rural areas and agriculture making up 42 per cent of its gross national product. Noting that cotton was Mali's primary agricultural product, he said the subsidies enjoyed by cotton producers in Europe and the United States continued to be of concern. It was regrettable that the trade talks in Cancun had failed to resolve that issue. Mali had great respect for the rules of international trade and hoped a fair solution could be reached for cotton producers in Africa. Greater justice and fairness in international trade was needed to promote economic and social development for all countries.

Turning to the needs of elderly people, youth and disabled persons, he said Mali had established an Institute on Geriatrics to implement a national ageing strategy and to coordinate programmes to promote the well-being of older people on both regional and national levels. The family was the framework for social harmony, and his Government had reformed family laws to provide greater protection for families and children.

Youth employment was a priority for his Government, which considered its young people a vital component in the strengthening of its democracy, he said. In Africa, where many people were incapacitated on a daily basis from disease, malnutrition, and conflicts, the rights of disabled persons were also of particular concern. Mali fully supported the work of the ad hoc committee towards a convention to protect and promote the rights of disabled people.

ITTIPORN BOONPRACONG (Thailand) said that from Thailand's experience, the 1997 Asian financial crisis had enabled the Government to learn an important lesson -- an effective development strategy must not only aim at achieving high economic growth, but at enhancing balanced and sustainable development. Thailand had therefore adopted people-centred and coherent economic and social development strategies. Thailand's economic policies to alleviate poverty and promote employment were pursued in harmony with social policies aimed at strengthening the local communities, protecting the vulnerable groups and promoting human development.

Thailand attached importance to building partnerships with all sectors of society in the country, he said. At the international level, his country sought to promote partnerships between developed and developing countries, as well as among developing countries. Capacities of developing countries needed to be further enhanced in order for them to effectively participate in international decision-making and norm setting. Thailand therefore supported partnership between developing countries and international organizations, as encouraged by the Monterrey Consensus.

ISHTIAQ ANDRABI (Pakistan), saying the "trickle-down" effects of economic growth could not be relied upon to remedy social problems, underscored the need to integrate social development into economic policies. Social development would remain elusive without the collective efforts of the international community. The link between social development and the prevention of conflict was widely

acknowledged, and Pakistan fully endorsed the Secretary General's views that conflict prevention was an integral part of the quest for social progress and poverty reduction.

Turning to the role of the family in social development, he said the family was the first line of defense against social disharmony and disintegration. United Nations programmes must work toward strengthening the family unit. In accordance with Pakistan's traditions, younger family members considered it a sacred duty to care for their parents and ageing relatives. The Government had also established a national task force to formalize efforts towards promoting the well-being of elderly people and better utilizing their talents and capabilities.

IYA TIDJANI (Cameroon) said the Millennium Summit had confirmed the commitment of world leaders to fight poverty and environmental degradation. A consensus had emerged on reforming the monetary, financial and trade systems of the new international order. Poverty was the greatest obstacle to efforts to achievement development. There must be support for economic and social development on a national level, as well as support on the international level through official development assistance.

Another factor that needed to be taken into account was the need for coordinated policies, and concerted national and international action to offset the negative impact of globalization on social development. He welcomed the Global Employment Agenda set up by the International Labour Organization and the Youth Employment Network set up by the Secretary-General.

Concerning trade, developing countries had expressed their concerns time and time again, he said. Developed countries must live up to their commitments concerning trade, debt relief and official development assistance. Cameroon had chosen to pursue comprehensive sustainable development policies, with the human being at the centre. The Government had also undertaken projects to fight corruption, to improve the health and education sectors, and to increase employment opportunities.

YANKILA SHERPA (Nepal) said her country had been making consistent efforts to improve the standard of living, with a special focus on the more than 85 per cent of the population who lived in rural areas. Nepal's development plan stressed the improvement of the quality of rural life through infrastructure improvement. Those efforts had been undermined by the destruction of properties by so-called Maoist groups, whose activities had resulted in much suffering for many people.

Nepal's current five-year plan aimed at poverty reduction through programmes targeting health care, drinking water, and education, she said. Its education policy was guided by an education-for-all approach that focused particularly on marginalized groups in rural areas. The major thrust of its health programmes was on improving maternal child health, family planning, and combating malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS.

To address social inclusion in the development process, her Government prioritized increasing youth employment and reducing the trafficking of women. The major problem facing young people in developing countries was access to education and employment. The increase in female representation in political life had allowed for significant advancement for women in society. Nepal fully supported a convention to promote the rights of disabled people, as the convention would help to mainstream their needs in development strategies. The special problems of elderly persons also needed to be considered in development policies. Lastly, international cooperation was essential to the success of all national efforts to implement social development programs.

VALERIE LALJI, Youth Representative of Suriname, said that in some of the developing countries many young persons were brought up in single parent homes. The effect this had on them was that many of the girl's became teenage mothers and raised their children without a father. Due to the deteriorating economic situation in many of those countries, the poorer families were directly affected. This could lead to other social problems such as domestic violence and alcohol and drug abuse. Many young persons, particularly in developing countries, were forced to become sex workers to cover their cost

of living and, most of the time, that of their families. The consequences were that they were more than ever being exposed to the danger of sexually transmitted diseases.

A good partnership must be developed between youth and their respective governments on the one hand, and between youth and regional and international organizations on the other, she said. This would increase problem solving concerning youth related matters and stimulate active youth development. Youth were a crucial factor in the development process. They were the next leaders of the world. Involving them in processes that would affect them now and in the future was, therefore, essential.

FLORENCE CHENOWETH, Director, FAO Liaison Office with the United Nations said the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had undertaken efforts to address the impact of population ageing on rural development. While the shift towards an older age structure could lead to less forward-looking and more subsistence-oriented livelihood strategies, rural ageing should not be viewed as an entirely negative trend. The benefits of ageing included the wealth of skills and experience that older people brought to their families and communities. Older people were a crucial element in the intergenerational transmission of cultural identity and social cohesion.

She said development strategies should therefore account for the challenges posed by population ageing to food security and rural development. Given the expected demographic trends, rural development in poorer countries would be increasingly powered by older persons. Recognizing older people as active participants in social change was essential for devising new strategies to ensure progress in rural development.

SYED SHAHID HUSAIN, of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said the natural family was the basic social unit of society on which the pillars of the human society rested. It was, therefore, natural that one stood for the objective of strengthening the family so that a clean and healthy societal environment could emerge. Several delegations had drawn attention to using the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004 as an opportunity to develop measures for reinforcing national and international institutions aimed at identifying and addressing impediments in this direction.

The role of the United Nations Secretariat was crucial, and he called for strengthening of the family unit in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The family -- the natural family -- was the God-made vehicle through which the global village of the future could be developed into a harmonious, productive, and progressive world community. That was the kind of community that the Millennium Development Goals envisaged.

Statements in Exercise of Right of Reply

A representative of Israel, exercising her right of reply, said she regretted having to take the floor but she had been compelled to do so to respond to Syria's "preposterous statement". Syria had mentioned the respect for human rights and humanitarian law and accused Israel of violating humanitarian law.

How could Syria talk about human rights? she asked. It was well known that Syria sponsored terrorism. Terrorism violated the very essence of human rights and humanitarian law. Syria had referred to Palestinians living in a humanitarian crisis. The real humanitarian crises were the constant terror and suicide-attacks in Israel that killed the innocent indiscriminately. Every act of Israel was an act of self-defence.

Exercising the right to reply, the representative of Syria said using the term terrorism as an excuse to harm others was shameful. Everyone had the right to talk about terrorism except Israel, as that country was an occupying power and was the one that had brought terrorism to the region ever since its establishment. She reminded Israel of its massacre of thousands of Palestinians, adding that the latest attack on Syria was a violation of national air space and a clear violation of international law that was condemned by the international community.

Israel had uprooted and displaced Palestinians ever since its establishment, resulting in Palestinian refugees scattered throughout the world, she said. What was happening in the occupied territories was the result of continued oppression by Israel. Occupation alone was the reason for what was happening, and Syria demanded the return of the occupied territories to their rightful owners.

The observer of Palestine said it was important to state that Israel must not be allowed to hide the fact that it was an occupying Power. That was the context and the framework within which all problems in the region must be viewed. This applied to the hopelessness of suicide-bombings too, since they were a result of the occupation — not the cause. Israel had tried to justify its actions as actions against terrorists; however, no argumentation could justify grave breaches in international humanitarian law. The occupation was the cause of the current terror.

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