

STATEMENT BY MR. A.K. BHATTACARJEE, MINISTER ON AGENDA ITEM 27 -
IMPLEMENTATION AND OF THE 24TH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL
ASSEMBLY, AGENDA ITEM 108 - SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS
RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH AGEING,
DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY, AGENDA ITEM 109 - FOLLOWUP TO THE
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF OLDER PERSONS: SECOND WORLD ASSEMBLY ON
AGEING (THIRD COMMITTEE) ON 11TH OCTOBER 2001

Mr Chairman,

Allow me to congratulate you and the Bureau on your election. We would also like to thank Mr John Langmore for his introductory statement.

Mr Chairman,

The ever increasing interdependence and integration of global societies require a closer evaluation of the impact that actions in one part of the world have on another. The inter-connectedness of societies was at no time more predominant than now. The Report of the Secretary General on "The World Social Situation" attempts to outline that dynamic interrelatedness of societies around the globe.

Since the last report on the "World Social Situation" in 1997, the world has seen a number of significant changes - the devastating financial crisis, the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS, increasing poverty, joblessness, shrinking resources and a retreat from international cooperation, to name a few.

The report on the "World Social Situation" outlines a number of trends that we have always known:

While developed countries have moved to the high profit-earning knowledge-and-technology based economies, the mass of developing countries continue to be mired in the low end of the production and distribution systems, creating a few havens of prosperity and larger enclaves of poverty.

The share of low and middle-income countries, as a proportion to the world GDP, continued to fall from 28.6 in 1980 (base) to 21.6 percent in 1998. Comparatively, the proportion of world GDP increased for high income countries from 72.4% to 78.4%.

Though globalisation promoted a regime of trade liberalisation increasing the value of world imports and exports at a compounded average annual rate of 6.25% between 1980 to 1998, the share of developing countries remained stagnant at a quarter of the world trade.

Perhaps, the most significant socio-economic phenomena is that liberalisation has shifted workers from the tradable to the non-tradable informal sector and depressed wages thereby deepening the dichotomy between the formal and informal sector. One example quoted in the

report bears testimony to the dilemma of the developing countries. When legislation was introduced in a country banning child labour from a thriving garment industry, the child workers moved into the informal area and began working in more hazardous conditions.

Not only has inter-country inequality deepened but intra-country inequality which was declining in the 25 years between 1950 to 1975, reversed in the years after the eighties, particularly, in the era of globalisation. Inequality was found to have risen or stopped declining in developing nations affecting roughly 80% of the world population.

There tidings are grim for developing countries. No wonder then that social disruptions persist. An environment that does little to enable development and consequently resources for the provision of even the most basic social services, cannot promote the principles of social justice and human rights.

Mr. Chairman,

The grimness of the world social and economic situation finds reflection in the condition of social groups in the developing world. We will not individually comment on each of them, but confine ourselves to a few remarks on the reports before us.

The Secretary General's report on Cooperatives in Social Development is important. India has been a pioneer in the cooperative movement which began in my country in 1905. Cooperatives continue to occupy an important place not only as a mode of production but also as a distributive system and a vehicle for collective social enterprise. We note that, in the 54th General Assembly, governments were expected to comment on the draft guidelines aimed at creating a supportive environment for the development of cooperatives. Only 21 responses were received. We recommend that the draft be circulated again. The guidelines are for a legal framework at the national level and it would not be proper to adopt them without either full fledged inter-governmental negotiation or, at the least, a broad range of governmental views.

On the Secretary General's report on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth for year 2000 and Beyond, it is heartening to see from the Annex of the report that almost all member states have implemented national youth policies, coordination mechanisms and programmes of action. Perhaps, it is now time to look at sectoral issues which affect youth throughout the world. We would like to see the issue of youth employment being given priority since this undoubtedly is the single major issue affecting their empowerment, particularly in developing countries.

5th December, 2001 will mark the culmination of the International Year of Volunteers. The report of the Secretary General is perhaps the first attempt at defining the spirit, the concept and the importance of volunteerism, and should be the foundation on which voluntary work could be built in societies the world over. A resolution on the general principles of volunteering taking into account different situations and societal settings is before us and we hope it will be adopted by consensus. India is a contributor to the UN Trust Fund for Volunteers and has several volunteers working for the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman,

The preparatory process for the Second World Assembly on Ageing has started in right earnest. Global attention is focused on this silent demographic transition taking place in all parts of the world. The necessity of re-evaluating the international strategy which was agreed in the first World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna in 1982 has been felt in the light of these transitions that have been witnessed, rather rapidly, since then. Developing countries have been projected to have an increasing proportion of their population in the 60+ category. Amongst them, the proportion of women will be on the rise. The productive capacities of the older persons, particularly in developing countries, should be harnessed. In that, the integration of older persons should not be perceived to be in conflict with the opportunities for the youth and other age groups. This is particularly relevant for developing countries where opportunities are scarce and competitive. We look forward to the outcome of the Second World Assembly on Ageing to be held in Madrid in 2002.