

**Statement by Mr. A. Gopinathan, Joint Secretary in the Second Committee of the UNGA under
Agenda Item 103 - Implementation of the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of
Poverty on October 12, 2001**

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset we would like to convey our appreciation for the report of the Secretary General on the "Implementation of the First UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty". We would also like to associate ourselves with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Iran on behalf of G-77 and China.

2. Poverty has many dimensions. It expresses itself in the form of hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, lack of drinking water, lack of minimum health facilities, lack of shelter and lack of employment opportunities. The causes of poverty are often quite complex and include a varied mix of social, economic, historical, natural and geographical factors. It is our belief that, if we wish to conquer this malaise, we need a strategy of development which combines efforts at general economic growth on a broad front with specific programmes designed to address specific categories of population, including women. The role of the international community in creating an enabling environment that is supportive of national development and poverty eradication policies is crucial for the global fight against poverty.

3. It is a matter of great concern that, although global living standards have risen dramatically over the past decade, the decline in extreme poverty has been slow - falling from 28% in 1987 to 23% in 1998. Even though 100 million people were liberated from the yoke of poverty in the last decade, millions more have been added to those living in abject poverty as the world population increased. The total number of poor in the world, therefore, has remained constant. Currently, out of the six billion inhabitants of the world, around 1.2 billion live on less than US \$1 a day and 2.8 billion on less than US \$2 a day. Clearly, as stated in the Secretary General's report, "the global war on poverty is likely to be with us well into the 21st century". In our view, this is a war that has to be won. This is of particular importance to us, as we live in a region which has 500 million people - the largest number in the world - living on less than a dollar a day. In a globalised world, poverty eradication cannot be treated as the exclusive responsibility of individual nations. It is a shared responsibility that requires a global strategy. Eradication of poverty and of underdevelopment is the greatest challenge of our times and needs the immediate and urgent attention of the international community. The political will is there. Our leaders in the Millennium Summit Declaration laid down clear targets and objectives - to halve by the year 2015 the proportion of the world's poor whose income is less than \$1 per day. We now need to take concrete action to achieve this goal. We hope that the International Conference on Financing for Development will devise specific mechanisms for ensuring the availability of stable and predictable financial resources for development and poverty eradication. The UN Decade for Eradication of Poverty should contribute to achieving the target of the Millennium Summit. The annual consideration of this agenda item in the Second Committee provides us an opportunity to take yearly stock of progress achieved so far, to identify the constraints and to evolve viable responses to overcome these constraints.

4. The projections and assessments, based on past performance, on achieving the global poverty eradication target are not very encouraging. We draw attention to four illustrative observations:-

· **The World Bank in its Development report last year pointed out that in order to cut income poverty by half by 2015, the compound rate of decline in poverty should be 2.7% per year. Instead, in the period from 1990 to 1998, the rate was 1.7%. The World Bank has now projected that some ten million more people are likely to be living on less than \$1 a day due to the recent terrorist attacks in the United States.**

· **The International Fund for Agricultural Development report on Rural Poverty calculates that only ten million people a year manage to escape from the conditions of extreme poverty, less than a third of the rate required to meet the commitment made at the UN Millennium Summit.**

· **To reduce hunger by half, the number of undernourished should decrease by 20 million a year as against the eight million per year achieved in the 1990s, as pointed by the World Food Programme.**

· **ILO has drawn attention to the 500 million people, almost entirely in developing countries, who are unable to earn enough to keep their families above the US \$ 1 a day poverty line.**

5. The track record of the 1990s serves as a reminder that we need to redouble our efforts in our collective fight against poverty. Multi-pronged action needs to be taken that would ensure the availability of food & nutrition, provide access to basic social services and enhance human capacity along with creating opportunities for income generation.

6. The role of the international community in providing support for building human & institutional capacities, making available financial resources and transferring technologies to developing countries, is crucial. The participation of the developing countries in international economic decision-making and norm-setting processes would ensure that their concerns are duly reflected and this, in turn, would contribute towards creating an international environment supportive of development. The High Level Panel on FfD has computed that, for achieving the international development goals as contained in the Millennium Summit Declaration, an additional amount of US \$ 50 billion per year would be required. We call on the developed countries to take necessary steps to reverse the declining trend in ODA. Indeed, if the agreed ODA targets alone were to be met, an additional amount of US\$ 100 billion a year would be generated.

7. In India, eradication of poverty remains a major challenge and we have evolved a strategy that complements acceleration of economic growth with a focus on the provision of basic services for improving the quality of life through specific targeted poverty eradication programmes. These programmes, operating both in the rural and urban areas, seek to generate self-employment and skills to the poor. We are encouraged with the assessment in the Secretary General's report that India would be able to meet the poverty eradication goals set up in the Millennium Summit Declaration, if future growth rates are the same as in the 1990s. We have been successful in reducing poverty from 38.9% in 1987 to 23.33% in 2000 and, in accordance with national plans, target to reduce it to 20% by 2007 and to 10% by 2012.

8. Lastly, Mr. Chairman we would like to emphasise the important contributory role that the UN system can play in eradicating poverty. We have noted the useful information in the SG's report on the contributions by the various Funds and Programmes, regional commissions and specialized agencies to the efforts to eradicate poverty. While much has been done, much more remains to be achieved. The UN system must accord the highest priority to developmental activities. We support the launch of the global poverty campaign as also the setting up of the World Solidarity Fund as complementing international efforts on poverty eradication.