



General Assembly

Sixty-ninth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
20 October 2014

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 3rd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 8 October 2014, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Mesquita Borges (Timor-Leste)
later: Mr. Davis (Vice-Chair) (Jamaica)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 26: Social development (*continued*)

- (a) **Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly** (*continued*) (A/69/157)
- (b) **Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family** (*continued*) (A/69/61-E/2014/4 and A/69/187)
- (c) **Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing** (*continued*) (A/69/180)
- (d) **Literacy for life: shaping future agendas** (*continued*) (A/69/183)

1. **Ms. Walter** (Austria), speaking as a youth delegate, said that in today's contradictory world, what unified young people were their calls for peace, for societies grounded in equality, for inclusive economic development and for drastic action to tackle environmental degradation. Education would be key to transforming those calls into action. Past failures and current divisions hampered progress, and the walls separating societies needed to be torn down to promote openness and tolerance. Society must not exclude any group. Of particular importance was equality for women and girls. Critical, nuanced thinking about global issues must be encouraged to defuse hostility and prevent people being blinded by patriotism and propaganda.

2. It was time to rethink the global economic system. Universal access to quality education and vocational training would enable people to enter the labour market and break the cycle of poverty. Education should also foster human development, however, and should enable youths to become active citizens who knew and stood up for their rights.

3. Direct action to tackle environmental degradation and climate change must be taken for the sake of generational justice despite the costs. And young people must be involved in the process, for there could be no peace, progress or prosperity without the full and equal participation of the world's youth.

4. **Mr. Mahmoud** (Egypt) said that the cooperation of all actors of the international community would be

required to implement the strategies and policies recommended in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/69/157). Egypt welcomed the attention given in the report to Africa, where poverty and suffering were still prevalent. In that regard, Africa's development priorities should be determined in accordance with the Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

5. The new Constitution of Egypt stressed the responsibility of the State to ensure social cohesion, social justice and equality in rights and before the law for all citizens and groups. To reduce income inequalities and improve living standards, the Government had increased the minimum wage, social benefits and pensions. In relation to disabilities, his country valued the joint projects undertaken by the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including in Egypt. The Government had started building a comprehensive national database on persons with disabilities as part of its implementation of the recommendations of the outcome document of the High-level Meeting on Disability and Development.

6. The ageing and concerns of older persons must be mainstreamed in national development strategies to ensure their full participation. Family-oriented policies with an intergenerational focus had gained ground as integral components of Egypt's development efforts. It was essential for family issues to be given special attention in accordance with each country's own laws, traditions and religious background. Youth were the linchpin of durable development, and a number of initiatives to promote employment, literacy, political participation and skills among young people had therefore been launched.

7. Social justice, economic growth and sound environmental stewardship could not be achieved while countries were still under foreign occupation. Such occupation denied people their right to self-determination and adversely affected their country's economic and social development. The expansion of terrorism was also hampering social development and should be addressed in the Secretary-General's future reports on social development. Economic and environmental challenges currently overshadowed the social dimension of the development agenda. Egypt reaffirmed its commitment to working with all

delegations to implement policies and strategies suitable for all nations to ensure the inclusion of the social dimension in the post-2015 development agenda.

8. **Mr. Al-Obaidi** (Iraq) said that Iraq was making every effort to promote social development and ensure that the basic needs of the population in relation to housing, health, education and employment were met. Legislation based on the valuation of human life as the foundation for development had been enacted to protect individuals and ensure democratic practices in labour relations, as well as the integration and protection of disabled persons in line with the country's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. A programme to help young people start businesses was also under way, a minimum wage had been established, and oil revenue and private-sector funding were being used to raise living standards and provide social services for the elderly and persons with disabilities.

9. The social rights of youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities were enshrined in the 2005 Constitution of Iraq. The Government was now implementing economic reforms and building institutions to pursue higher levels of social development in the post-2015 environment. A major threat to development was terrorism, which targeted not only citizens, but also public and private institutions and infrastructure. Considerable progress had been made nonetheless, and efforts to promote social and economic development would continue alongside the fight against terrorism.

10. **Ms. Kelly** (Dominican Republic), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the importance of social rights and human welfare had been recognized in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development in 1995, but almost 20 years later, as noted by the Secretary-General, millions still suffered from hunger, lacked proper sanitation and died in childbirth, and forests, wildlife and fish stocks were still disappearing. Poverty reduction was possibly the most urgent task, and the Dominican Republic was investing in education, health and youth employment to break the cycle of poverty. Four per cent of gross domestic product had been spent on expanding the education infrastructure and improving teacher training, and the whole population was now literate. That achievement had earned it the title of "Champion Country" in the Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative.

11. The Dominican Republic welcomed the appointment of the Secretary-General's new Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility. The Government was committed to the full integration of persons with disabilities, including in the workplace, and had opened a new centre that provided care, education and other services to children with disabilities. An accessible tourism model was being promoted to ensure equal access for disabled persons and expand the supply of tourism services available to them. Her country also welcomed the appointment of the first Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons. Those rights should be mainstreamed in the development agenda beyond 2015, and a specific international convention should be drawn up to protect older persons from exclusion and oblige countries to implement rights-based policies for them.

12. Despite technological advances, young people in countries like the Dominican Republic still lacked the resources and facilities needed to compete on an equal footing, and she supported the ongoing efforts of the United Nations to promote meaningful talks among youth, Governments, civil society and other parties. Placing citizens at the centre of policymaking, ensuring broad-based participation and basing decisions on statistical and other social indicators was essential if policy action was to have a real impact on the lives of present and future generations.

13. **Mr. Unnainmäki** (Finland), speaking as a youth delegate, said that not enough had been done to stop the human rights violations occurring in conflict areas around the globe. The world seemed to have become too familiar with failure and too numb to the loss of human life. Yet the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had shown that progress and development were possible. Few young Finns knew about those Goals, but Finnish youth were unequivocal about the kind of world that they wanted: a fair and equal world, free from the threats of climate change and violence.

14. Specifically they called for fair and non-discriminatory labour practices and for all business to be green business, and they fully supported the HeForShe campaign. Studies had shown that lack of social and economic opportunities, not ideology and religion, were the main drivers of radicalization among young people. Yet had communities been built in a way

that accepted youth and encouraged them to realize their full potential?

15. Young people must be involved in decision-making for progress to be permanent. In the light of the 2014 Colombo Declaration on Youth: Mainstreaming Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Member States should explore how best to pursue an inclusive global dialogue with youth. Young persons, especially girls, must be empowered to bring their voices and experiences to the United Nations, including by facilitating the participation of youth representatives from developing countries through the United Nations Youth Fund. The role of youth in peace and rebuilding processes, not just conflict, needed to be recognized and developed by the Security Council. Initiatives such as the My World survey and the recent appointment of the Secretary-General's first Envoy on Youth had aroused the interest of young people; now was the time to consider how best to harness the great potential that they represented.

16. **Mr. Rybakov** (Belarus) said that the priorities of the social policy of Belarus were to increase simultaneously the birth rate and life expectancy, promote large, stable families and prosperous labour activity, create opportunities for young people and guarantee a decent standard of living in old age. His country had achieved the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) ahead of schedule, notably reducing the proportion of the population living below the poverty line by more than three times, from 40 per cent in 2000 to around 5 per cent in 2014. It was also efficiently accomplishing the tasks set out in the State social and economic development programme for 2011-2015 with regard to increasing living standards by providing access to high quality health services, education and culture.

17. In response to the growth of the senior age group, the Government was investing in social services. There were currently 146 local social services centres in operation, as well as residential care homes for the elderly and disabled persons and sanatoriums. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were involved with new types of social services, such as assisted living to help orphans with domestic and vocational adaptation and temporary care for children with disabilities, thereby offering parents temporary respite.

18. Youth were considered a most important social group, and youth policy was therefore a key part of social policy, focussing on ensuring equal opportunities for the development of young persons and providing them with decent education, health services, work and housing. In Belarus, 2015 had been declared the Year of Youth in order to develop the creative, scientific and professional potential of young persons, promote their active involvement in the social and economic transformation of the country and instil in them a sense of patriotism and civil responsibility.

19. A large-scale programme to promote and support families was underway, encompassing the promotion of a prosperous and successful family model comprising two or more children, the creation of social, economic, legal and other services for improving the well-being of families with children, families with disabled children, single parents and low-income families, the provision of financial and targeted social assistance and a programme aimed at young persons to promote conscious parenting and prevent domestic violence. Stable, traditional families would ensure social cohesion and stability in society, and the adoption of policies that extend the rights and opportunities of families was a long-term solution to the country's demographic problems. The role of the family as a factor of sustainable development should be reflected appropriately in the post-2015 development agenda.

20. **Ms. Enkhsetseg** (Mongolia) said that the concern expressed in the Secretary-General's report (A/69/157) that, to date, economic and environmental concerns had largely overshadowed the social dimension, should be addressed. Promoting empowerment of people had rightly been noted in the report as a means to accelerate the realization of more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development. Empowerment required, inter alia, investment in social services, improved access to decent work, open and inclusive institutions, transparency and accountability, respect for human rights and an impartial justice system. State efforts to empower people in Mongolia focused on increased public participation, the development of information and communication technologies, better access to decent work, and education.

21. A national policy on decentralization through direct democracy had been introduced to involve citizens directly in the identification of development priorities and the monitoring of local budgets. A

standing parliamentary committee on petitions had been set up, and a public hearings system had been established at all administrative levels. As a result, since 2009, over 400 bills and decisions had been discussed in public hearings, and the opinions of over 17,000 citizens had been heard. Telephone hotlines and online services had been set up to reduce red tape and facilitate direct contact between government agencies and citizens. An extensive judicial reform was also underway.

22. Social development and empowerment were impractical without information and communication technologies. Today Mongolian citizens enjoyed free access to affordable broadband services, and mobile phone networks covered 90 per cent of the country's vast territory. Radio and television broadcasting had recently switched to digital technology and an e-signature project was under way. At the international level, Mongolia was proud to chair the Freedom Online Coalition, and her delegation invited Member States to join the organization, which was committed to advancing Internet freedom, and participate in its next conference, which would be held in Ulan Bator in May 2015.

23. To tackle a persistent unemployment rate of 7 to 10 per cent, her Government had been realigning employment policy with the concept of decent work, supporting labour rights and small- and medium-sized enterprises and promoting the employment of people over 40 years old, young herders and persons with disabilities. Employment agencies had been consolidated in a new integrated network. Progress had been recorded, but further action was needed in relation to productive employment, fair pay, worker safety and social protection for families.

24. Mongolia had been active in promoting education and literacy efforts, including within the context of the United Nations Literacy Decade. The goals of the Decade had been integrated into the country's strategic development policies, including the 2010-2021 education programme. Despite steady progress, much remained to be done to achieve literacy for all. Her delegation supported the five strategic axes proposed in the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on literacy for life: shaping future agendas (A/69/183) for scaling up literacy action worldwide, including through a country-driven, community-owned and collaborative multi-stakeholder

partnership. Mongolia also supported the integration of literacy into the post-2015 development agenda, and that and other relevant recommendations would be reflected in the draft resolution that would be tabled by her delegation on the subject.

25. **Ms. AlMuzaini** (Kuwait) said that the active participation of all society was required to implement the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/69/157), and it was important to focus on the social dimension in the development agenda beyond 2015. Kuwaiti society was governed by the principles of solidarity and interdependence: over \$70 billion had been earmarked in the 2014 national budget for social spending; and 70 per cent of the retail trade was managed by State-supported cooperatives that also provided solidarity-based social services. With regard to youth, the Kuwaiti Government was engaged in large-scale public-private initiatives to promote the participation of young people in decision-making and development projects.

26. As to older persons, in line with the call to address the abuse and neglect of the elderly made in the report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/69/180), a 2007 law penalized those who failed in their duties in that respect. Meanwhile, the rights of persons with disabilities were protected by a law enacted in 2010. The Kuwaiti Government's commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities was clearly demonstrated in the "Journey of Hope" maritime expedition that it had launched, which was raising awareness around the world of how to care for persons with mental disabilities, and it strongly supported the incorporation of disability issues in the post-2015 development agenda.

27. In relation to the observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, Kuwait had focused on the importance of work-life balance, and working women were now entitled to a number of benefits, including maternity leave. The Government had also boosted social assistance to those who had fallen on hard times. Lastly, given the importance of alleviating the suffering endured by the Palestinian people as a result of the occupation of their territory, Kuwait had donated \$500,000 to the decent

work programme established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in occupied Palestine.

28. **Mr. Khan** (Pakistan) said that Pakistan was committed to realizing the objectives of the World Summit for Social Development to build a just and prosperous society for all its citizens without any discrimination. Education, health services, microfinance and skill development were central components of the new social development policy in Pakistan. The National Plan of Action on Education aimed to achieve 91 per cent net primary enrolment and to increase the gender parity ratio to 0.95, by increasing enrolment, decreasing the number of drop-outs and improving the quality of education through the use of new technologies. Budgetary allocation for education had been raised to 2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), and the Prime Minister had committed to increase it further to 4 per cent of GDP by 2018.

29. The Prime Minister had initiated several landmark programmes to provide microfinance and job training to deserving young entrepreneurs for starting their own jobs and businesses. Steps had also been taken for political empowerment of youth, through participation in the Youth Parliament and other representative mechanisms. Pakistan had adopted a number of social development schemes to address the growing needs of its over 11.6 million senior citizens, including pensions, insurance, old-age benefit schemes and special discounts on railways and airfares. A draft Senior Citizen Bill, which comprehensively covered the rights and needs of senior citizens, was currently under consideration by the Government.

30. His country had adopted a national policy to provide the full support of the Government, private sector and civil society to persons with disabilities. The Disabled Persons Ordinance of 1981 had reserved a special quota for disabled persons in public sector jobs. Special schools, vocational institutes and medical centres catering to the needs of people with disabilities had been established. The Government also provided financial assistance and essential equipment to families with disabled persons.

31. *Mr. Davis (Jamaica), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

32. **Mr. Haribajan** (Suriname), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the National Youth Institute served as both a consultative body of youth and a monitoring mechanism of youth policy, ensuring the Government

received input from young people in the formulation of that policy. The National Youth Parliament, which was recognized in national legislation, organized an annual Youth Congress — an open forum for young people to engage in direct discussions with and provide recommendations to policymakers, ministers with responsibility for youth issues, the President and the Vice-President.

33. The National Youth Parliament had participated in capacity building and skills training for young people and held discussions with the Ministry of Education. Following its recommendation to improve access to information and communications technology, concrete actions had been taken to provide laptops and Internet services to schools and youth in various parts of Suriname. In cooperation with several actors, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), a project focusing on youth at risk, school dropouts and youth in conflict with the law had been implemented. A confidential hotline for youth had been established. A debate had been started in the National Youth Parliament on the contribution of young people regarding the post-2015 development agenda, and recommendations would be provided to the authorities.

34. The Council for Human and Social Development of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) had mentioned Suriname, the portfolio holder in community development and cultural cooperation, as demonstrating best practice for youth participation. Suriname had played an active role in building a bridge between the young people of CARICOM and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), placing youth high on the agenda during its chairmanship of UNASUR and hosting the first UNASUR Youth Summit in November 2013.

35. **Mr. Shava** (Zimbabwe) said that his country had strived to ensure that its development policies were geared towards achieving economic empowerment and independence for its people and had consistently prioritised empowerment programmes aimed at ensuring that Zimbabweans benefited from their country's resources. In order to fulfil its vision for all Zimbabweans to have ample opportunities to achieve economic independence and upward social mobility, the Government had prioritised education and health, on the basis that an educated and healthy population was better able to secure gainful employment that contributed to the development of the economy.

36. Universal access to education for all Zimbabweans had been emphasized, and a number of measures had been put in place to assist those unable to meet education costs, such as the Basic Education Assistance Module, which assisted orphans and children with disabilities in paying school fees. The Government had also remained mindful of the importance of support for completing secondary education, ensuring there were sufficient opportunities to obtain tertiary education and skills training. In order to ensure that young people were employable and to tackle unemployment, a more robust synergy between the education sector and industry must be prioritised. Such efforts must be accompanied by practical and sustainable measures to boost the economy and ensure job creation.

37. The main thrust of the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation was indigenisation, empowerment and employment creation. Leveraging the mineral wealth and rich natural resources of the country through value addition and beneficiation would yield tremendous dividends for the economy and boost job creation. As part of its efforts to achieve economic empowerment for all, Zimbabwe had enacted and implemented several important pieces of legislation to ensure broader access to land and other natural resources.

38. His country had put in place policies and measures to promote and protect the family, the disabled, women, children and older persons. As a fundamental unit of society, the family was entitled to State support and protection. Although Zimbabwe had continued its efforts to expand social services, in the long run, such measures could only be effective when complemented by policies that addressed the root causes of social and income inequalities and enabled people to lift themselves out of poverty.

39. **Ms. Radina Koleva** (Bulgaria), speaking as a youth delegate, said that in a survey conducted among young people in Bulgaria, 80 per cent had identified youth unemployment as their greatest concern. She called upon Governments to join efforts in order to significantly decrease the rate of youth unemployment worldwide and urged them to encourage young people to seek internships and other means of gaining professional experience prior to graduation, as well as to take an active role in creating such opportunities.

40. **Ms. Ani Koleva** (Bulgaria), speaking as a youth delegate, said that Bulgaria was strongly committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and followed a human-rights-based approach in all its policies and programmes. There was much more to be done to implement fully the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As post-2015 agenda discussions progressed, she stressed the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of relevant strategies for sustainable development.

41. Investment in education and extracurricular activities could be the answer to combating inequality and non-formal training could serve as a bridge between the labour market and the formal education system. Better social inclusion could be achieved if both national and international policies were aimed at the elimination of the root causes of social inequality. As young people were an important resource and had proven to be key partners in the development of strategic policies, investing in capacity-building was one of the best decisions for the future of the young generation. Noting the chance for young people to reshape the world by designing the post-2015 development agenda, she called for an inclusive agenda based on human rights.

42. **Mr. Thornberry** (Peru) said that his Government was firmly committed to implementing social inclusion programmes in line with the agreements reached at the World Summit for Social Development, held in 1995 in Copenhagen. A Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion had been established in 2011 to tackle poverty, inequality and social risks and was pursuing a national strategy that focused on child nutrition and development, the integral development of adolescents and the protection of older persons.

43. States must promote both economic growth and social progress. The Peruvian Government developed and pursued economic and social policy in parallel since a stable economy was a prerequisite for investment, job creation and poverty reduction. Social spending would increase by 12 per cent in 2015, with half the additional funds going to education, health and support for the most vulnerable segments. The goal was to reduce the poverty rate to less than 20 per cent of the population by mid-2016.

44. States were primarily responsible for promoting social inclusion, but international cooperation could

multiply the impact of State action. He, therefore, called on donor countries, the United Nations and international financial institutions to boost cooperation for national social inclusion policies, particularly in developing countries.

45. **Ms. Balraj** (Sri Lanka), speaking as a youth delegate, said that Sri Lanka provided state-funded free education to all from kindergarten to university and its literacy rate was consequently among the best in the developing world — 92.3 per cent for boys and 90 per cent for girls. Gender parity had been achieved in primary schools and overall enrolment was at 100 per cent. However, the biggest challenge facing the education system was the disparity in resource distribution between urban and rural areas.

46. Given that unemployment and underemployment were another challenge, mainly due to a lack of training opportunities and the absence of a smooth transition from school to work, skills development was a critical need. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development provided vocational training to approximately 25,000 young people through an island-wide network of vocational training centres. The youth unemployment rate had been reduced from 21 per cent to less than 18 per cent by establishing the University of Vocational Technology and introducing a vocational training curriculum in high schools.

47. Women and girls around the world faced many structural barriers that prevented them from achieving their full potential. There was, therefore, a need to re-examine the structural dominance and power relations in societies. Lastly, Governments should support the call in the outcome document of the World Conference for Youth for a dedicated United Nations day on youth skills development in order to raise awareness of the importance of skills and create more opportunities for young people.

48. **Mr. Wanniarachchi** (Sri Lanka), speaking as a youth delegate, expressed his solidarity with the HeForShe campaign launched by UN-Women and pledged to take the message to men and boys in Sri Lanka. Even though the world's first elected woman Prime Minister had been Sri Lankan, much more needed to be done to ensure that more young women were represented in parliament and other key decision-making bodies. However, he noted that, while many countries needed to improve education access for girls, in Sri Lanka girls were performing better than boys.

49. The Sri Lanka Youth Parliament was a unique example in mainstreaming youth participation in decision-making. Addressing the parliament in 2013, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms. Navi Pillay had praised the institution for its dedication to a tolerant and all-inclusive approach.

50. **Mr. Canay** (Turkey) said that the steady growth and consistent improvement in human development achieved in recent years had allowed Turkey to concentrate more on social development issues. Having become party to all major international conventions relating to social development issues, it was in the process of fully integrating them into its national legislation.

51. Turkey had eliminated extreme poverty, addressed inequalities in regional development, made notable progress in achieving gender parity in primary education and reducing child and maternal mortality rates, multiplied social programmes targeting women, children, youth, persons with disabilities and the elderly, and nearly achieved universal primary education. Literacy rates had greatly increased.

52. The priorities of social development were ensuring disabled persons had access to basic services and were included in decision-making processes, raising awareness of the rights of the elderly, working on agendas that took into account the new demographic realities and needs of the ageing population, furthering women's rights, ensuring gender equality and providing proper education and employment opportunities. Equal opportunity in education was key to achieving better social development and would ensure social inclusion, combat discrimination and build healthy and democratic societies. Lastly, it was essential to extend support to conflict-prone and developing countries in the area of social development, as economic hardship and conflict increased social and economic vulnerability.

53. **Mr. Maope** (Lesotho) said that his country had heightened efforts to create an environment that would allow nationals to achieve sustained social development goals. It supported social development by listening to the views of the poor and marginalized members of society, promoting and enhancing the well-being of all members of society. Aware that poverty eradication had become a chronic problem, Lesotho had undertaken efforts to promote the effective

implementation of actions and programmes under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) geared towards employment creation and poverty reduction, for which international cooperation was needed.

54. The Government had sought to counteract HIV/AIDS, a major hindrance to social development, by adopting the HIV and AIDS Policy 2006, which provided a framework for prevention, control and management of HIV/AIDS. The post-2015 agenda should place unachieved MDGs at the top of the new framework in order to galvanize accelerated action to reach unmet goals. The new framework should scale up ambition, for example, by pushing for an end to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

55. Owing to a huge investment in education, Lesotho had been progressing well towards achieving universal access to education, in particular primary education. It had one of the highest literacy rates in Southern Africa. His country prioritized the need to mainstream disabled persons in national strategies and development initiatives to ensure their full participation in development without any form of discrimination. In order to attain social development objectives, the international community needed to combine efforts and implement the social development agenda in line with the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

56. **Ms. Podoroghin** (Republic of Moldova) said that addressing social exclusion and inequalities defined the quintessence of the social dimension of the post-2015 development agenda. The new agenda would bring about welfare for all, participation and inclusion. Her country had invested in human capital, facilitated the participation of all social groups in development processes and mainstreamed the MDGs, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action into national laws and strategic policies. Such measures had led to an improved quality of life, expanded opportunities for individuals and increased the role of women in social and political life.

57. Following the accession to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Government had sought to provide social protection and health assistance for disabled persons, and a law on the social

inclusion of persons with disabilities had been adopted, containing provisions on accessibility, integration, assistance, education and professional development. A critical shift in the overall approach towards disabled persons had occurred, recognizing their human value, dignity and potential and respecting their human and civil rights.

58. In order to reduce unemployment, particularly among young people, her Government had implemented the National Youth Strategy for 2010-2015 in line with the European Union Youth Strategy for 2010-2018. The unemployment rate was continuing to decrease, owing to the expansion in career guidance and recruitment assistance, the establishment of new businesses and small enterprises, and the increase in education and mobility opportunities. In 2013, the Government had established Joint Offices for Information and Social Services in several districts, providing advice on social protection, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and financial services. Lastly, her country would be a candidate for the Commission for Social Development for the term 2016-2020 and was fully committed to contributing to United Nations efforts to promote and implement social development and human rights.

59. **Ms. Wyckmans** (Belgium), speaking as a youth delegate, said that youngsters were not always aware of the existence of children's rights and human rights and hoped that one day they would have full and equal access to information on those rights and know where to seek help if their rights were violated. That would help empower young people faced with social, economic and environmental challenges. It had recently become possible for Belgian children to lodge a complaint with the Committee on the Rights of the Child if their rights were violated. She called on Governments and the United Nations to continue to work towards providing children and youth with information on exercising their rights. That should be done in a youth-friendly way, for example through the education system and social media.

60. The commitment to promoting the rights of young people expressed by the Secretary General and his Envoy on Youth should be reflected by a rights-based approach in the post-2015 development agenda. While international developments were of great importance, much remained to be done at national level. Belgium welcomed the efforts of the United

Nations to continue to monitor the implementation of children's rights and human rights.

61. **Mr. Dellatte** (Belgium), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the right to equality regardless of gender, gender identity or gender expression was very important for children and youth. Young people were protected under human rights legislation, but laws were not always fully implemented. Young girls and LGBT children and youth too often faced social barriers and exclusion at school and in youth movements. Building gender-equal societies was important because it was necessary for every child and young person to be involved in the creation of an open-minded and equal world. It was the responsibility of Governments to protect LGBT and other youth and inform them of their rights.

62. Schools in Belgium had included sexuality education in their curriculums, which was a positive start, but education should not be the only field of action. Young people also wanted a global political approach on the right to gender equality. He therefore welcomed the HeForShe campaign and work being done by the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union in that regard. Children and young people faced many difficulties during their transition into adulthood, especially during the current time of crisis. He called for assistance to be provided so that they could defend their rights.

63. **Ms. Larsen** (Norway) said that achieving the Millennium Development Goals and following up on Rio+20 to shape a post-2015 framework with ambitious and realistic goals was a high priority for Norway. Her country believed that all people should have equal rights and opportunities, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or disability, and was pleased that education and decent work for persons with disabilities were central elements of the post-2015 process.

64. Norway was working hard to improve the situation of disabled persons, with a focus on education, humanitarian assistance, health care and women. It was important for NGOs representing persons with disabilities to be involved in that work. Approximately one third of children not attending primary school had disabilities, and disabled children frequently did not receive education adapted to their needs and were more likely to drop out.

65. Education, therefore, was one of the most effective ways to break the cycle of discrimination and poverty often faced by children with disabilities. That was a key priority for her country's international development cooperation, and it had already increased its support in that area by 15 per cent. In collaboration with the other Nordic countries, Norway had supported making national education plans an important issue in the Global Partnership for Education. In that regard, there was currently a strong focus on strengthening data and statistical work, which was necessary if marginalized groups were to be reached.

66. **Mr. Lorentsson** (Norway), speaking as a youth delegate, said that mental health problems among young people were emerging as a global issue. The youth of Norway were concerned that not addressing this would mean failing to ensure basic human rights for all people. Youth in many countries were unable to access basic mental health care. Failing to address that issue would have a significant impact on the social and economic integration of over a billion young people.

67. On International Youth Day, the Secretary-General had stated that stigma and shame often prevented youth from seeking the support that they needed. Involving children and youth in designing mental health services would ensure that such services were tailored to their needs. He urged Member States to develop policies that made service-user involvement a guiding principal in the design and delivery of all health-care services. Meaningful youth participation was a vital part of creating a youth-inclusive society. Approximately one third of children not attending primary school were disabled, and it was important to reach those children. He, therefore, recommended that the Member States that had not yet done so should ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

68. Over 60 million girls were also being deprived of their right to education. He called on Member States to improve the quality of education among girls and young women. Giving girls and young women access to education was vital in order to combat extreme poverty, inequality and lifelong exclusion from society and also lowered maternal and child mortality rates. Lastly, he stressed that Member States should respect international standards to prevent schools and universities from being used for military purposes during armed conflict.

69. **Ms. Dragomir** (Romania), speaking as a youth delegate, said that changes should be made to outdated education systems to enable young people to realize their potential to be better students, citizens and human beings. While financial investment was crucial, less costly but more efficient methods of education should be considered, such as those using cloud technology. Such systems should encourage creativity and collaboration among peers.

70. The purpose of education was not simply to give students practical skills but also to produce creative, courageous thinkers. Preparing students for the workplace was crucial, in view of the high rates of youth employment in many countries. However, studies had shown that employers were more interested in communication skills, critical thinking skills and integrity than industry experience. Work should begin to devise education systems that would meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

71. **Mr. Ciubotaru** (Romania), speaking as a youth delegate, said that education should include a civic dimension for youth, who were part of the community and capable of shaping the world around them. Discussions at the United Nations and other international bodies on issues such as youth unemployment should lead to all young people making an individual effort to improve the situation for their vulnerable peers. Few young people were currently involved in volunteer work, and Romanian youth delegates should work to rectify that situation. They welcomed all forms of civic engagement, including youth establishing non-governmental organizations, fighting to protect the environment or working with persons with disabilities.

72. Young people had an optimistic attitude that encouraged them to become personally involved in bringing about positive change. They were capable of rethinking the education system and needed to be involved in the work of the community. That would give them the maturity that they needed to bring about systemic change. Consequently, there should be a focus on greater youth participation at the United Nations.

73. **Mr. Yao Shaojun** (China) said that the promotion of economic development was the only way to eradicate poverty, improve well-being, resolve the issue of unemployment and achieve social harmony. Appropriate social policies were needed to ensure that such development was inclusive, equitable and

sustainable. All Member States must make economic development the driving force for the balanced advancement of economic, social and environment causes, so that everyone could enjoy the fruits of development. The international community must attach greater importance to eliminating inequalities between countries, increase assistance to developing countries and create an environment that would foster the common development of all countries.

74. All countries must take their social reforms further, promote employment, perfect their education, health, housing, social security systems and ensure full public participation in relevant decision-making processes. Efforts must be made to expand the protection of vulnerable groups, promote equal participation of persons with disabilities in social life, incorporate the ageing issue in economic and social development plans, help youth actively contribute to social development and progress, emphasize the fundamental role of the family in social development and promote social cohesion.

75. The post-2015 development agenda must continue to address social problems and achieve three major goals, namely improving well-being by eradicating poverty and promoting development; enhancing inclusiveness and safeguarding social fairness and justice; and strengthening global development partnerships and improving implementation through diverse development models and common but differentiated responsibilities. As education was an important driver in resolving social issues, Governments had a duty to ensure that all citizens were able to enjoy their right to education. China supported the inclusion of education and literacy in the post-2015 development agenda.

76. His Government attached great importance to social development. In 2013, disposable per capita income in cities and towns increased by 7 per cent, the number of people living in poverty in rural areas was reduced by 16.5 million, minimum subsistence allowances were increased and 6.6 million units of government-subsidized housing were built. Efforts had been made to improve education in rural areas, and basic medical insurance was now universal. Social administration had been improved to ensure public participation in decision making in order to maintain social harmony and stability. The Government would continue with such reforms.

77. Investment in public health services was of great importance to social development, as it increased the chances of obtaining decent work and enabled wider participation in society. China stood firmly in solidarity with the West African countries where the Ebola epidemic was currently hindering social development, and had sent nearly 200 medical workers to fight Ebola on the ground, in addition to providing medical supplies and equipment. His country would actively participate in other international assistance efforts and was ready to give priority to helping African countries improve their disease prevention and control systems.

78. **Ms. Dhital** (Nepal), said that her country welcomed the recommendation of the Secretary-General for urgent and more effective action at all levels through policies embracing empowerment as a tool for eradicating poverty, creating jobs, promoting inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth and providing social protection. Individuals should be empowered through investment in areas such as education, vocational training and health care.

79. Sustainable development could only be achieved through meaningful and active participation by all members of society, including women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons and indigenous peoples. Her country was strongly committed to building an egalitarian society and increasing economic, social and political inclusion. While not all of the Millennium Development Goals would be attained by 2015, her country had made considerable progress at the social, economic and political levels in the past few years, despite being in a post-conflict transition phase, and she believed that the unfinished agenda must be included in the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda.

80. Creating employment opportunities was Nepal's first priority, as the majority of the population was economically active. There was concern over the increasing number of migrant workers living abroad while their families were at home, and this would help prevent the outflow of the labour force. Priority was being given to rural areas and measures were being taken to absorb workers leaving agriculture. Her country was currently focusing on reducing poverty and unemployment through inclusive and sustained growth and had instituted several programmes to create employment opportunities and enhance production, particularly in the agricultural sector. It was also

developing infrastructure in rural and remote areas. Positive discrimination was providing education and employment opportunities for women, children, girls, persons with disabilities, senior citizens, ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups, and the Government was committed to ensuring that all children had access to free and compulsory education.

81. The scope of Nepal's social security programmes was modest but had expanded to cover senior citizens, widows, ethnic and indigenous groups, persons with disabilities and fully incapacitated persons. Social development was critically important to prevent conflict and maintain lasting peace as well as to achieve sustainable development. Economic development was needed to promote and sustain achievements made in the social sector. Nepal was committed to bringing about a massive socio-economic transformation at the national level, but would require significant support and cooperation from the international community to achieve that.

82. **Mr. Dos Santos** (Paraguay) said that economic growth in Paraguay had been encouraging, but the challenge remained to ensure that this growth was inclusive in order to reduce the equality gap that characterized Latin American society. Through its stable macroeconomic base, solid financial system and policies to reduce poverty, Paraguay was paving the way for socially inclusive economic growth. Creating a country where no-one was excluded was the Government's main priority.

83. While poverty rates had fallen significantly over the last decade, a quarter of Paraguayans were still living in poverty and one in ten in extreme poverty. The achievements that had been made, such as the drop in poverty from 35.1 per cent in 2009 to 23.8 per cent in 2013, were the result of political and social programs implemented by successive Governments. The current Government was working on further reducing poverty rates and helping prevent those who had emerged from poverty from falling back into poverty again by providing better public services in key areas such as health and education.

84. A programme had been implemented to increase the income and access to social services of families living in extreme poverty in rural areas, which were the most vulnerable in terms of infrastructure, social services, employment and productivity. The programme included providing grants that were only

paid if children in the household were vaccinated and attending school, expanding old-age pension coverage, constructing and improving homes, improving health-care services in areas with vulnerable populations and providing school equipment and school meals to encourage attendance.

85. Lastly, he underscored the importance that his Government attached to international cooperation in support of national development programmes and compatible with each country's priorities and needs. Owing to its stable macroeconomic basis, solid financial system and reduced poverty, Paraguay's main goal was to achieve economic growth together with social inclusion for all.

86. **Mr. Nguyen Trac Ba** (Viet Nam) said that the international community had made significant achievements in promoting social development, which, together with social inclusion, should be at the core of the post-2015 development agenda. At the same time, the United Nations should redouble its efforts to address the root causes of poverty, inequality and social exclusion and ensure social protection. The focus should continue to be on empowerment through education, training, health care, job creation and access to production resources. Better coherence and coordination of policies and actions at the national, regional and international level was crucial.

87. Social protection had always been a major priority of his Government. The well-being of each and every person was the driving force of its national development. Empowerment of people was therefore central to its poverty eradication and sustainable development efforts. Viet Nam was strongly committed to helping disabled people exercise their rights and participate equally in social activities and was working hard to meet the targets set in its national plan, including providing vocational training and employment for 250,000 persons with disabilities and increasing the accessibility of public buildings and transportation as well as providing inclusive education, health care and legal services. It planned to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the end of the year.

88. Viet Nam had a young, but rapidly ageing, population. It was implementing an education and skills training strategy to reduce youth unemployment to below 7 per cent. His country was also implementing a program on ageing that involved

providing welfare entitlements and health insurance as well as creating groups for elderly people in order to improve their health and well-being and enable them to contribute to the preservation of traditional culture and identity. Viet Nam reaffirmed its commitment to collaborating with the United Nations to create a post-2015 development agenda aiming to eradicate poverty and promote social development and inclusion for all.

89. **Mr. Lasso Mendoza** (Ecuador) said that the fight against poverty should involve overcoming inequalities. Focus should move beyond human subsistence goals, measurable by market consumption figures, to fairer goals that took into account enjoying a dignified life. That would achieve higher levels of social well-being and reduce the economic, territorial, environmental and cultural distance between groups of people and would be attainable if the post-2015 development agenda prioritized human beings over capital.

90. His country was concerned that, around the world, economic interests continued to take priority over social concerns, owing to the practices of traditional financial institutions as well as neoliberal doctrines that considered social investment to be a waste. Investment in social development was a priority for Ecuador and had increased exponentially over the last seven years. Poverty levels in the country had fallen in recent years, thanks to Government programs designed to meet the basic needs of the population, namely health care, education and housing. His country had made unprecedented investments in health and education, ensuring access to justice, and promoting the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to recreation and artistic expression as well as the right to work.

91. Ecuador recognized the contribution of the work of women to the economy and had developed inclusive policies to ensure that women and their views were present in the workplace. It also sought to promote the role of indigenous women as agents for development. There could be no social development in a society that did not respect the rights of persons with disabilities. Mention of these rights had been included in his country's Constitution in 2008, and Ecuador was also working at regional level to promote inclusion in society and the workforce. To that end, it had proposed the appointment of a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility. His country was also making early childhood development policies

a priority in order to overcome the intergenerational trap of poverty and reduce poverty more quickly. Ecuador was promoting such policies within the United Nations system, and the Third Committee should do the same.

92. **Mr. Momen** (Bangladesh) said that with less than one year remaining to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, billions of people were still suffering from extreme poverty and millions were living in conflict situations and being deprived of their fundamental freedoms. As the next set of development goals were being drawn up, it would be necessary to invest wisely in order to bring about meaningful change. That would only be possible by putting people at the centre of development.

93. Bangladesh had taken a people-centred approach in its development agenda, believing that people could face emerging challenges successfully if they were empowered. That empowerment would be attained by eliminating extreme poverty, providing education and training, eliminating all discrimination and extremism and including excluded persons in governance and the workforce. Quality education had been identified as an important factor in empowerment, and Bangladesh had therefore made it a priority. Initiatives included free education, stipends for girls, school meal programmes and financial assistance for underprivileged, high-achieving students. Efforts were also being made to ensure that children with disabilities were able to enjoy their right to education.

94. Youth-focused initiatives had been undertaken to give young people the skills that they needed to enter the domestic and overseas labour markets. Microcredit was being made available to encourage entrepreneurship among young people. Training opportunities were also being provided for persons with disabilities. Programmes focused on women had also been implemented in areas such as education, health care and social protection. Efforts were also being made to improve the presence of women in the workforce and increase their income-generating opportunities.

95. Special emphasis should be given to supporting the family as a fundamental unit of society. Family-oriented policies helped reduce poverty, increased levels of education, and ensured that children, elderly persons and persons with disabilities were cared for.

96. Human rights could not be ensured without economic development. Enhanced international cooperation and collaboration were needed to support the efforts of developing countries. Those countries needed their development partners to contribute the amounts that had been pledged. In addition, the development efforts of many coastal countries were being eroded by frequent natural disasters and other environmental challenges. The global community must provide meaningful support to address those problems.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.