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14th meeting
held on
Monday, 18 October 1982
at 10.30 a.m.
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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 14th MEETING

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 77: INTERNATIONAL YOUTH YEAR: PARTICIPATION, DEVELOPMENT, PEACE: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/37/348 and Add.1 and 2, A/37/237)

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AGENDA ITEM 89: WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION CONCERNING DISABLED PERSONS: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/37/160; A/37/351 and Corr.1, Add.1 and 2)

1. Mr. RIPERT (Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation) said it was more clearly recognized than in the past that social questions were as important to the development process as economic questions; at a time when the serious difficulties in the world economy seemed to jeopardize efforts to improve standards of living for everyone, especially the poorest, the Committee had an essential contribution to make to the strengthening of international co-operation. The general debate of the General Assembly had been dominated by the themes of the current economic crisis, the acceleration of the arms race and its consequences for the international political situation and the need for more effective action on the part of the United Nations. Nevertheless, it was a serious mistake to underestimate the importance of the social dimension of development. There must be greater awareness of the need for a sense of interdependence based on equity and justice, and consequently a greater commitment to the objectives of promoting social progress and improving standards of living in a freer world.

2. In the current world crisis, unprecedented challenges had emerged and the solutions found for the difficulties of the past were no longer adequate. The crisis was not simply economic, involving the slowdown in trade and problems of financial markets, or structural changes in the production apparatus, but was aggravated by the general deterioration in international political and economic relations and the acceleration of the arms race, which threatened not only international security but also world economic stability. If growth was to resume and international co-operation was to be reactivated on a more equitable and more stable basis, there must be changes in attitudes and social and political institutions.

3. Major social and cultural movements and far-reaching changes in value systems, as well as geopolitical changes, were affecting the operation of the world economy. Relations among States were thus the product of a complex interplay of currents and forces, which must be better understood. The Committee's detailed analysis of the social aspects of development therefore made an essential

(Mr. Ripert)

contribution to the success of the future development of national economies and the strengthening of international co-operation. Further analyses and investigations on social problems and policies were needed at a time when many of the ideas which underlay the current concepts of social development were being questioned in a changing context, especially in the developing countries. There were demographic changes, changes in the aspirations of women and young people, in the directions and scope of migration, in the forms of criminality and the course of criminal justice; there were also less obvious changes affecting relations within the family, production units and other institutions. The aging of populations, together with the reduction in the number of children, would inevitably influence the socio-economic systems of all countries, whatever their levels of development and their cultural or social structures. Other changes in relations among individuals and social groups were taking place as a result of the improvement in the general level of education and the rapid development of the mass communication media.

4. The scope of those changes and the complexity of their interrelations called for a new evaluation of the constituents of social progress and the obstacles to achieving it. Theory could not be a substitute for deeds, however, and progress was linked with the experience gained from action. The building of a more just and equitable world was not merely an abstract ideal but a realistic objective which must guide mankind's actions, above all because many forces, if not controlled, or if accepted as inevitable, would lead to a breakdown of societies and international communities. Combined efforts were needed to counter the forces of intolerance, fanaticism, dogmatism, frenzied pursuit of individual interests, narrow nationalism, cynicism and others, in order to promote development and international co-operation in accordance with the Charter. By way of example, the real economic difficulties experienced by developed countries were often cited as a justification for reducing public aid to developing countries, on the ground that if the aid was kept up, domestic socio-economic programmes would suffer; yet the problem should not be regarded from a narrow viewpoint and expenditure on development assistance should be compared with expenditure on arms. Aid to development contributed directly to the maintenance of peace and security, and halting or even slowing down the arms race would release new resources for the development of the developing countries and the well-being and prosperity of all.

5. A better understanding of the dimensions of the current crisis and of the interactions between the economic, social and political factors involved, a reconsideration of the principal elements of social development and of social policies capable of promoting development as a whole, an awareness of the realities of interdependence and a reaffirmation of the principles of equality and justice as the foundations of social development and international co-operation should constitute the frame of reference for the Committee. At the same time, consideration could be given to the possibility of more frequent exchanges of experience, including experience in the field of social policies, and greater co-operation among developing countries, especially countries encountering similar problems and experiences. Efforts in that direction, as well as overall policies, would help restore faith in the multilateral approach; the United Nations was the

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(Mr. Ripert)

appropriate forum for analysing those problems and co-ordinating action. Above all, the accelerated development of developing countries must be assured as the only way of enabling them to resolve their social problems, as had been forcefully reaffirmed by many speakers during the general debate; in that connection, the launching of a process of global negotiations was of particular significance.

6. Mr. CEAUȘESCU (Romania) said that as Chairman of the Advisory Committee for the International Youth Year, he believed that the second session of the Advisory Committee had made significant progress in the process of preparation for the Year; the adoption by consensus of all its recommendations to the General Assembly would increase their political and practical value and ensure their actual implementation. The session had clearly demonstrated the increasing interest in the International Youth Year on the part of Member States, specialized agencies and, above all, youth organizations. The main conclusion had been the generally expressed desire to proceed at all levels to preparations for the Year in the spirit of the recommendations of the Specific Programme of Measures and Activities to be undertaken prior to and during the International Youth Year. The Programme was a basis for new activities at the local, national, regional and international levels for mobilizing the younger generation, Governments and other decision-making bodies to intensify their efforts for a substantial improvement in the situation of young people. Naturally, it was also necessary for Governments and international and regional youth organizations to draw up specific action programmes directly linked with the situation, aspirations and needs of young people in different countries or regions and different economic and socio-political conditions.

7. It was quite evident that the younger generation wished to participate as actively and as effectively as possible in the efforts of the world's peoples to eliminate economic and social anachronisms and in the solution of all the problems of the contemporary world. Young people must have access to effective means of political and economic action in each society, so that they might put their great creative potential to the service of the ideals of peace and independence, co-operation, democracy and progress, along with all revolutionary, progressive and democratic forces. Their desire to play a creative role in the transformation of the contemporary world was perfectly legitimate; events of recent years showed that young people were the most vulnerable social group and were most affected by the negative consequences of military conflicts, the arms race and the economic crisis. The achievement of disarmament and, above all, of nuclear disarmament, was a major objective of the struggle of young people. The broad movements for peace and disarmament which had emerged recently throughout the world and particularly in Europe demonstrated the commitment of the younger generation to achieving peace, one of the major goals of the International Youth Year.

8. Young people were profoundly affected by rising unemployment in both the developed and the developing countries and, in some cases, illiteracy and lack of vocational training, as well as the persistence in some countries of phenomena

(Mr. Ceaușescu, Romania)

which gave rise to criminality, parasitism, moral degradation, violence, terrorism, and drug addiction.

9. It was clearly necessary to draw up new policies for the younger generation in order to ensure the solution of the specific problems confronting them. The measures adopted thus far in the United Nations had not promoted the effective involvement of young people in the organization and functioning of social and economic life and in decision-making. Moreover, there was inadequate co-ordination of youth activities in the United Nations. It was therefore necessary to set up a United Nations body responsible for promoting international co-operation and co-ordinating the activities of the United Nations and specialized agencies in respect of youth; that body would maintain close liaison between the United Nations and youth organizations and actively concern itself with conditions of life, work, education and all other questions affecting young people throughout the world. The United Nations would thus be able to contribute to the adoption and implementation of programmes to support the younger generation in society and make full use of its potential.

10. The draft declaration on the rights and responsibilities of youth drawn up by the Advisory Committee at Romania's initiative was an umbrella document concerned with the economic, social, political, scientific and cultural aspects of the life of the younger generation in the present and the future. The preliminary discussions had shown that adoption of the declaration would stimulate and facilitate efforts to identify better ways and means of promoting the rights of the younger generation to work, education and culture and ensuring its broad participation in the development process, political and social decision-making, and the solving of the major problems of the era, at the national and international levels. His delegation hoped that all Member States, specialized agencies and governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned, including youth organizations, would contribute to the final drafting of the Declaration so that it could be adopted by the General Assembly.

11. The five regional meetings would have an important role to play in promoting the objectives of the International Youth Year; they would provide an opportunity for a useful exchange of experience on the preparations for the Year and no doubt stimulate further action to solve the problems of the younger generation. The Advisory Committee's recommendation to hold a meeting in Europe, where young people faced many special problems, was of particular importance.

12. Young people in Romania were actively involved in the preparations for the International Youth Year. They also participated actively in the development process, political and social life and the management of State affairs. They were making energetic efforts to achieve the objectives of the International Youth Year and to ensure that all young people throughout the world could realize their ideals in an atmosphere of peace and co-operation among peoples. Romanian youth also participated enthusiastically in organized activities for peace and disarmament and had signed the appeal for peace and disarmament sent to the special session of the

(Mr. Ceaurescu, Romania)

General Assembly in July 1982. Romania had hosted the Round Table "Youth in the 1980s" held at Costinesti under the auspices of UNESCO as one of the events for the International Youth Year. The meeting had given a clearer picture of the younger generation and its needs and aspirations and had, in general, shown the need to enhance the contribution of young people of all continents to the maintenance of peace and security and the building of a better and more just world. It was to be hoped that the General Assembly's discussions would lead to the identification of new practical ways and means of broadening and diversifying international co-operation in solving the problems of young people.

13. Mrs. DECKERS-DAEMEN (Netherlands) speaking as her country's youth representative, said that her delegation welcomed the General Assembly's recognition of the Geneva Informal Meetings of international non-governmental organizations as an important channel of communication between the United Nations and youth and youth organizations. She regretted, however, that only a few countries had followed the guidelines recommending Governments to consider the inclusion of youth representatives in their delegations. Her delegation believed that the emphasis should now be placed on intensifying efforts towards the implementation of the guidelines in order to ensure full and effective participation of young people in the activities of the United Nations and, in particular, in the preparation and observance of the International Youth Year.

14. Older people continually used the expression "Youth has the future". Young people found that difficult to accept because they lived in the present. A recent conference organized in Europe had been entitled "Preparation for life". Such a title gave the impression that young people did not live but had to be taught to live before they could join society. Similarly, the aged, who had most of life behind them, were no longer allowed to remain in society's activities. She wondered what gave the middle generation the right to behave as if it were the sole possessor of the present. One of the subtitles of the conference she had just mentioned was "Preparation for culture". That seemed to suggest that the culture of young people was not real. Youth had its own ways of cultural expression, which could be seen in the way young people dressed and their preference for certain types of music. Furthermore, older people referred to youth as progressive, playful, imaginative and original; but when it suited their purpose, they referred to youth as extremist, subversive and deviant. In short, young people were regarded as being interesting but also as problematic enough for the United Nations to designate an International Youth Year with the themes of participation, development and peace.

15. Young people ought to feel free to do what they thought was right and to say what they believed. For example, they should be able to choose alternatives to military service and to participate in peace movements and other political activities of their choice. However, freedom remained an empty word if responsibility was not included. Young people did indeed make many demands, but they were also prepared to discharge their duties. For that reason, they wished to be accepted as equal partners in society and saw no need for a declaration specifically concerning the rights and responsibilities of youth. As equal partners, young people had rights and responsibilities equal to those of other

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(Mrs. Deckers-Daemen, Netherlands)

members of society. They were well aware of those responsibilities, and their rights were sufficiently covered by existing international instruments on human rights. Young people did not wish to be treated as a special group for whose benefit extra provisions should be made.

16. Her delegation would advocate an approach based on the wishes and specific interests of young people themselves. There should be no spending of money on a world conference relating to youth when that money could be put to better use, there should be no youth decade and no new institutional structures, since so many already existed. Young people preferred stimulating youth initiatives, acceptance and appreciation of their opinions, and allowance for openness, freedom (including freedom of conscience) and progressiveness. Youth issues should be integrated into the overall United Nations policies and programmes. Existing structures should be strengthened at the working level instead of creating a new United Nations body on youth. The additional staff needed should be integrated into the structure of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. The International Youth Year would be successful only if it was brought close to young people all over the world in their own environment and living atmosphere, thus offering them the opportunity for true participation.

17. Ms. RICHARDSON (Observer for the Holy See) said that the activities undertaken in preparation for IYY presented an opportunity to affirm certain convictions that responsible persons in the international community held regarding youth: young people were not only useful but were indispensable and vital to their seniors. That was so because in addition to the joy and comfort they could offer today to their elders, they were strength and energy for the future human community. Young people could feel confident in the knowledge of their vital status in the human family.

18. The General Assembly had given priority to participation as a theme for IYY. The Church held that young people should be encouraged to assume their appropriate responsibilities for participating in the life of society. That implied an education suited to the preparation of those who would, after a short interlude, be responsible for society and an education which was truly a liberation from ignorance, so that persons would become fully the agents of their own development. Education was for the formation of the human person, whose spiritual and moral dimensions it should take fully into account. Young people therefore might be expected, with encouragement from their elders, to reach out beyond the self to belief and to commitment to a cause, to an ideal and to God. Such education included the acquisition of one's cultural heritage and meant learning the rights and the duties in relationships between individuals and between the individual and society. Genuine education should respect the creativity of young persons and recognize their autonomy in the educational process. Furthermore, young people should be provided with the means to express themselves in a significant way at the local, national, regional and international levels, so that their views could be heard by duly constituted authority. Thus would society attain the goal of youth participation.

(Ms. Richardson, Observer, Holy See)

19. The experience of the Church revealed the complementarity of values and cultures across the divisions of national borders. The Church saw a growing interdependence among young people, and although the youthful crisis of values was not identical in every region and continent, the thirst for truth was everywhere apparent among them. Young people placed their hope in personal self-sacrifice and love of others and in competent, joyful fidelity to duty. The richness of cultural diversity existing in the world today and the attitude of openness and respect manifested by young people were among the most hopeful signs for the future in today's troubled world, deserving of the support of the international community.

20. The Holy See believed that information activities were indispensable to sensitize a broad base of the population for the preparations and continuity of IYY. Use of the mass media was highly desirable in a style appropriate to the topic. The establishment of networks of information in that area seemed a worth-while goal, and her delegation was pleased to see that the sponsors of the draft resolution before the Committee also recognized that priority.

21. Her delegation wished to associate itself with those that had expressed concern for the poorest among the young people in the world today. Attention should be paid to the millions of young people living in conditions of extreme poverty in the large cities of the world, those in refugee camps, those who sought employment, the illiterate, drug addicts, victims of prostitution and pornography, and those who were marginalized by society - young migrants, women and the disabled. Their situation was offensive to human dignity and to human rights; the Holy See hoped that constructive efforts in behalf of those groups could be carried out during IYY and that significant progress towards peace could be attained by such deeds of justice.

22. Mr. VAGLIANI (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said at the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly, he had had an opportunity to set forth the activities undertaken by UNESCO in the field of youth. UNESCO preferred to see youth not as a problem area but as a vital constituency for its activities.

23. Youth was a readily identifiable category and was linked to all economic and social areas of society. As the most vulnerable segment of society, youth should be viewed not as the single preserve of any one member of the United Nations family but as part of every problem area addressed by the United Nations. Since the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly, there had been active co-operation among the specialized agencies, and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs had fulfilled its role of focal point and lead agency for the United Nations system in that regard. All specialized agencies had participated in an informal working group, and a series of measures that would help the preparations for IYY had been drawn up. Whatever structure was created, however, the substantive responsibilities must remain within each specialized agency, with that structure playing a co-ordinating role.

(Mr. Vagliani, UNESCO)

24. Among its recent activities, UNESCO had organized in June 1982, in Romania, the Round Table on youth in the 1980s. That meeting, which had been widely representative, had made a set of recommendations for IYY which he hoped all Member States would study attentively. The Round Table had also issued a message stating that the critical situation of today's world was a challenge to all. Men and women, individually and collectively, were all concerned by and subjected to the pressure of the threat to peace, a menace that was often cruelly manifested in the reality of war and in the arms race which affected youth more than any other group of people. Youth was severely affected not only by war, but by violence in all its forms, violence inflicted on economies and cultures, on the freedom of whole populations and on fundamental human rights. The UNESCO legislative bodies too had been busily involved in preparations for IYY and had underlined at a recent session the role which UNESCO should play in those preparations. The Director-General had been invited to prepare programmes for youth in UNESCO's 1984-1989 medium-term plan.

25. UNESCO was interested in associating itself from the very beginning with the preparations for IYY and would continue to co-operate actively with the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. The International Youth Year could provide a great opportunity to implement those proposals and strengthen existing activities. In UNESCO's view, IYY would contribute to a renewal of today's world only if it was organized with the consent and support of the young.

The meeting rose at 11.45 p.m.