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REMARKS
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DEVELOPMENT

Opening Session of the 50th Session of the Commission for Social Development

New York, 1 February 2012

Distinguished Chair,
Madam Deputy Secretary-General,
President of the Economic and Social Council,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join Mr. Jorge Valero, Chair of the 50th session of the Commission for Social Development, the Deputy Secretary General, Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, and Mr. Miloš Koterec, the President of ECOSOC. in welcoming you to this important session.

This session has special significance for several reasons, but I will just highlight two of them.

First, it marks the fiftieth time that countries are meeting to deliberate on important social development issues and challenges.

For 50 years, we have been working together to ensure that development is primarily about *people*.

And during these 50 years, the world has recorded remarkable and unprecedented progress on the social development front, thus laying a strong foundation for economic growth.

We know progress remains uneven across regions and within countries. Yet still, the number of poor people living on less than \$1.25 a day in developing countries, has been significantly reduced.

Many people are living longer and healthier lives because they have greater access to public goods and services. Worldwide, child mortality rates have declined substantially. More children are attending and completing school.

And many countries have made considerable progress in empowering women and other social groups.

The Commission has played an indispensable role in catalyzing social change and in fostering social development. You have adapted your work programme to emerging social challenges. You have guided the global efforts to implement the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development since 1995.

The Commission's contributions to the social integration and protection of persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, youth and older persons have been likewise critical.

Mr. Chairman,

While we acknowledge these remarkable achievements, we still face continued and emerging challenges. Guidance by the Commission on policy action to meet these challenges will be needed, more than ever before.

Climate change and environmental degradation are putting multiple strains on some populations. This is amply demonstrated by the drought-induced social and humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa.

Concerns about rising income inequality continue. High unemployment and lack of social mobility have fuelled widespread public indignation in some countries.

The global economy still faces significant headwinds. And this poses considerable risks to poverty eradication efforts.

Many advanced economies have also shifted to monetary and fiscal tightening which has impacted social expenditures that are critical to social development.

We must determine how to build on the social development successes to address these challenges, how to strengthen the social pillar.

This fiftieth session of the Commission is also the policy session in the two-year cycle of the Commission's work.

This is the second reason I want to highlight the significance of this year's session.

The Commission is expected to produce an action-oriented policy document on the priority theme of poverty eradication, taking into account its relationship to social integration, full employment and decent work for all.

As we move forward in addressing the many challenges before us, our priority should be to strengthen the social dimensions of a global recovery.

If we want future growth to be sustainable, equitable and inclusive, we must now focus on social development. The deliberations here can thus play a crucial role in shaping our strategy.

As we all know, the UN calendar this year is marked by one key global event, namely the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

As we approach this conference, the work of this Commission should also aim to strengthen the social pillar of sustainable development.

Why should the social pillar matter to sustainable development? Because it addresses issues of access to resources and opportunities, social justice and equity, participation, and empowerment.

A strong social pillar means all development sectors are stronger, whether it is agriculture and infrastructure development, the management of natural resources, or rural and urban development.

A weak social pillar means weakness in other sectors as well.

Conversely, the real wealth of nations occurs when each and every individual has access to a decent job and educational opportunity, quality and affordable health care, adequate and nutritious food, secure shelter, and social protection.

Our development models should equally confront the persistent challenges of poverty, inequality, social exclusion and demographic change.

These issues are at the core of what constitutes the social pillar of sustainable development.

This Commission can play an active role in the Rio+20 process. How? By exploring practical ways to strengthen the social pillar of sustainable development! Bring your fresh ideas to the table!

Mr. Chairman,

As Secretary-General of Rio+20, I have emphasized the need for Member States to focus on how a green economy can best contribute to job creation and poverty eradication.

With the Conference's preparatory process well underway, there is even stronger emphasis on the need to strengthen the social pillar.

That is how we can all contribute to shaping "The Future We Want".

A future where social justice prevails. A future in which all individuals benefit from sustained growth and globalization while protecting the environment.

Distinguished Delegates,

As recent events in some parts of the world have reminded us, the progress we seek is not easy.

But I am hopeful for a bold set of policies during your session, policies that:

- strengthen the ability of countries to address the multiple dimensions of poverty;
- enhance the social pillar of sustainable development;
- advance the goals of the Second UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty;
- focus on employment in sectors that matter most for large segments of society;
- reduce inequalities; and
- improve real incomes in both rural and urban areas.

**Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,**

Many people are counting on us for policy outcomes that lead to concrete actions for poverty eradication and achievement of the MDGs.

You have an important role to play in strengthening the social pillar of sustainable development.

You can ensure that the social pillar figures prominently in the post-2015 development agenda and in the sustainable development goals, which are now under consideration by Member States in preparation for Rio+20.

I wish you success in your deliberations and assure you, Mr. Chairman and the members of the Bureau, of DESA's full support in your work.

I look forward to the outcome of the Commission's deliberations.

Thank you.
