

Entering Second Week, Social Development Commission Debates Entrenched Challenges of Discrimination, Unemployment, Affecting Broad Segments of Population Globally

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The Commission on Social Development today continued its review of United Nations programmes of action to address the situations of various social groups, with representatives from Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society debating such protracted challenges as discrimination and unemployment, which affected broad swaths of elderly, disabled and youth populations worldwide.

Much of the day's discussion centred on the achievements since -- and obstacles to -- implementing the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, which recognizes older people's ability to contribute to society, and calls for changes in attitudes, policies and practices to promote their rights and end discrimination against them.

Spain's representative said his country had made progress with the entry into force last year of a law on promoting personal autonomy and care for those in situations of dependency. The law outlined rights for those who could not care for themselves, either due to older age or disability, entitling them to Government care. The new system would care for more than 1 million dependent individuals, and it had received consensus support from businesses, trade associations, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Since the Madrid Action Plan, Spain had conducted annual seminars to consider the progress and problems of the elderly, and had proposed the creation of a working group within the Economic Commission for Europe to advance implementation of the Berlin Strategy, which outlined steps for addressing ageing within the European region. The Santiago Declaration, adopted at the seventeenth Ibero-American Summit in 2007, also committed Spain to promoting Ibero-American cooperation through comprehensive development programmes.

Regardless of the welfare system a country chose, the elderly should be treated with respect and dignity, Sweden's representative said. Elderly people were too often looked upon as an economic burden and a strain on the health-care system. "It has little to do with the economy, and everything to do with attitudes," she asserted. When discussing ageing populations, it was important to remember that people now lived longer. As there was much to learn from each other, Sweden would welcome an exchange of practices, experiences and knowledge on the systems for social services and social protection, regionally, as well as globally.

Malta's representative, speaking on the activities of the International Institution on Ageing, drew attention to the "pronounced scarcity" of trained caregivers as a serious deficiency in many developing countries. To fill that gap, the institute ran Malta-based training programmes in such areas as social gerontology and the demographic aspects of population ageing for policymakers, planners and programme executives. In the area of capacity-building, the institute had set up satellite centres in Singapore for the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries; in India, for the 10 South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation countries; and in Saint Petersburg, for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The representative of the International Federation on Ageing said she was encouraged to see the growing list of countries that had implemented an innovative form of social protection for older people, namely: social pensions, which were paid to older persons who would not normally be adequately covered by social security or other pension arrangements. Her organization planned to work actively with the International Labour Organization, and others, to extend social pensions and other income security programmes.

To address the special needs of persons with disabilities, Cuba's representative said her country was committed to promoting their rights through a variety of programmes dealing with training, employment and social and scientific technical exchanges. There was a national council, which monitored those and other activities. The Government had also been developing employment programmes, and, since 2005, nearly 30,000 people with disabilities had entered various fields in the labour market. Despite such gains, she said international inequities persisted, and the needs of people with disabilities should be included in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Providing a voice for young peoples' issues, the youth representative of the Republic of Korea, said that, despite the Commission's goal of providing full employment and decent work for all, almost half the world's youth was unemployed. The United Nations should delineate clear quality standards for legitimate youth employment, which could include the guarantee of minimum income and the provision of Government-level mentors. Youth were "spokes of a wheel" that moved the world forward, and it was imperative that they played a role in country decision-making.

Striking a similar chord, the representative of the United Nations Volunteers focused on the bridging effect of volunteerism for people of different ages and physical ability levels to connect with their communities. For young people, it meant acquiring skills and experience that could facilitate entry into the job market. For the elderly, it provided a way to improve their quality of life. For persons with disabilities, the Internet was opening enormous potential for volunteering online. Given such benefits, the Commission might consider including a reference to volunteerism in its outcome resolution.

Also participating in the debate were the Ministers for Social Development and Persons with Disabilities of Mali, Malawi, Cameroon, Zambia, and Indonesia.

The Director-General, Centre for Health Promotion of the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Director-General of the Department of Social Development of South Africa, and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services also spoke.

Statements were also made by the representatives of Japan, Russian Federation, Brazil, Italy, Chile, China, Mexico, Egypt, Bangladesh, Benin, Nepal, Myanmar, Morocco, Tunisia, Qatar, Paraguay, Monaco and Haiti.

Representatives of the following United Nations entities also spoke: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the International Labour Organization (ILO); and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Participants also included representatives of: the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP); European Youth Forum and World Organization of the Scout Movement; Baha'i International Community; Elizabeth Seton Federation; Foundation Chatal Biya; HelpAge International; International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse; Global Youth Action Network, on behalf of other youth organizations attending the Commission; and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan of North and South America.

The Commission for Social Development will meet again tomorrow at 10 a.m. for a panel discussion and interactive dialogue on "mainstreaming disability into the development agenda".

Background

The Commission for Social Development met today to continue its general discussion of the "review of the relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups".

Statements

TAKASHI ASHIKI (Japan) said that vulnerable groups -- including persons with disabilities, older persons and children -- were affected by social change and natural disasters, and thus needed the global community's frequent attention. Concerning persons with disabilities, Japan had promoted various measures and had last September signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Regarding youth issues, education was the "cornerstone" of their empowerment, and Japan had sought to improve its education system, with cooperation from families and local and national Governments. Further, it had provided nearly \$10 billion in official development assistance (ODA) to the education sector and was supporting youths in Asian labour markets through job creation and start-up businesses.

On ageing, he noted that the percentage of Japan's population over the age of 65 had surpassed 21.6 per cent, adding that the problems of an ageing society -- coupled with a declining birth rate -- were, thus, of great concern. Regarding family issues, he said the family played an important role in shaping society, and Japan was committed to addressing a growing difficulty of balancing family and work life, a weakening of bonds within the family and child abuse.

ANDREI PANOV (Russian Federation) said the Madrid Plan had drawn attention to the issues of older persons. His country had taken part in the ministerial regional conference last November under the aegis of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Its outcome would guide his country's future action.

In the Russian Federation, those of pension age accounted for more than 20 per cent of the population, and was projected to reach 25 per cent by 2015, he explained. Dealing with acute social problems was the main focus of Russian social policy today, and the President hoped to improve conditions. The population of older people living in poverty had been halved. In recent years, the relation between pensions and average salary had improved and work was under way to create a system of incentives to increase pension payments.

He said that policies to improve social conditions aimed to overcome stereotypes of older people, which encouraged a view of them as having creative potential. Regarding disability issues, he hoped the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities would take place this year, as the world celebrated the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. His Government planned to adopt measures to help disabled persons gain access to affordable housing and transportation. Federal agencies would be equipped with advanced diagnostics. Efforts were also under way to create infrastructure for rehabilitation centres for those with disabilities. There were more than 12 million disabled people in his country, and implementation of such measures would help return them to active life.

Ms. MENDONÇA (Brazil) said that her country's population, like others in the Latin American and Caribbean region, was ageing at an accelerated rate. Currently, there were more than 9 million people aged 60 and over in Brazil, and soon it would have the sixth largest population of older persons in the world. In light of that situation, the Government had made significant efforts to address the needs of its ageing population, taking into account the Madrid Action Plan. Together with the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Government had convened a relevant conference, out of which had emerged the Brasilia Declaration.

That Declaration, she said, had proposed, among other things, the start of consultations to prepare a convention on the rights of the elderly, under United Nations auspices. The text had also suggested requesting the Human Rights Council to consider the possibility of appointing a special rapporteur mandated to monitor the promotion and protection of the rights of older persons. Those two initiatives, if adopted by Member States, would put older persons on the same footing as

persons with disabilities. In that regard, attention should be given to older persons with disabilities such as dementia and other acute health concerns.

ROBERTO STORACI (*Italy*) said that, like other countries in Europe, Italy's population was ageing at an unbalanced pace. The Government had acknowledged that phenomenon and was taking active measures to address the myriad challenges by trying to develop policies that met the needs of every generation. As the population aged, the workforce also grew older, and Italy now had one of Europe's most unbalanced labour force in terms of age range. That had also been partly a result of its early retirement systems, a trend the Government was trying to slow with the enactment of certain reforms.

Still, older workers appeared to face obstacles obtaining and holding jobs, he said. There was a general lack of appreciation of older workers in Italy, and the focus was more on promoting already employed younger people. In response, the Government was trying to enhance its life-long training initiatives, among other things. In line with the Madrid Plan, Italy was also planning a strategy to promote active ageing and working to enhance the range of opportunities for older workers.

On Italy's young people, he said that, in 2006, the Government had established a Ministry for Youth, which dealt with relevant policymaking and coordinating of relevant national efforts on behalf of its youth. In addition, the national youth plan dealt with economic, cultural and civil society-related issues. Italy's youth faced a gap in school training and access to labour markets. One of the goals of the national plan aimed to narrow the digital divide and provide early and long-term access to new information and communications technology. Italy urged States to not allow new and wider divides to grow and to continue training and providing the access that would allow young people worldwide to take advantage of, and cope with, the rapidly changing information market.

CLAUDE ROCAN, Director General, Centre for Health Promotion of the Public Health Agency of *Canada*, outlined his country's efforts with global partners to address the growing concerns of older people in emergencies, stressing the crucial need for action on that issue. Using the Madrid Plan as a reference point, Canada's work to date had been primarily focused on building bridges of collaboration with stakeholders and constructing the evidence base necessary to develop workable strategies. The ultimate goal was to develop guidelines, tools and plans that could be used worldwide by Governments and non-governmental organizations to ensure that information on seniors in emergencies was widely disseminated and integrated into emergency planning and management.

He said that studies in many countries had demonstrated that older people had consistently been disproportionately vulnerable to both immediate and long-term consequences of emergencies. It was crucial that both emergency planners and those who cared for seniors, or who were seniors themselves, understood the factors that created vulnerability to emergencies and took appropriate action to reduce their impact. Often forgotten but important contributions by seniors to risk mitigation and response and recovery efforts should be integrated into emergency management. Among important events in that regard was a symposium on the 2004 Tsunami and Older People, which had been held at the International Association of Gerontology World Congress in 2005. Canada had also begun the process of building international collaboration for seniors in emergencies by working with such organizations as the World Health Organization (WHO) and Help the Aged UK.

In February 2007, 100 experts in gerontology emergency management and the seniors' community from the United Kingdom, United States, Lebanon, Jamaica, Japan, Canada and elsewhere had gathered at the International Workshop on Seniors and Emergencies in Winnipeg, Manitoba, he noted. The workshop's main findings had been detailed in a report, which served as "an incubator of strategic measures with important directions and cross-cutting sets of priorities" that would benefit older people in emergencies. As a follow-up to Winnipeg, participants would meet in Nova Scotia next month, focusing on tools and concrete plans with defined targets and a timetable. Collaboration -- with Governments at all levels, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academics and seniors themselves -- would be

key to success. Also encouraging had been the recent request by the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee to WHO and HelpAge International to lead the process to develop guidelines for older people in emergencies.

JOSEPH TROISI ([Malta](#)), speaking on the activities of the International Institution on Ageing, said the training of personnel was a major issue that needed urgent attention in order to meet the special needs of the rapidly growing older population. The pronounced scarcity of trained caregivers was a “very serious deficiency” facing many developing countries.

An autonomous body created in 1987 under United Nations auspices, the Institute had a mandate to train personnel from developing countries, provide advocacy to developing countries and act as a bridge between developed and developing countries in information exchange, he noted.

Describing training programmes in Malta, he said some 1,766 people from 137 countries -- including policymakers, planners and programme executives -- had benefited from programmes in such areas as social gerontology and demographic aspects of population ageing. This year, for the first time, an international training programme in policy formulation, planning, implementation and monitoring of the Madrid Plan would aim to discuss the implications of population ageing. “In situ” training programmes had been conducted in 21 countries since 1995, and those were tailored to meet the specific needs of older persons. Participants from Malta in training programmes outside the country benefited from the experience of others, while “in situ” programmes were more homogenous.

In the area of capacity-building, the Institute had set up satellite centres in Singapore for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, in India for the 10 South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation countries and in Saint Petersburg for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The Institute hoped to set up others in China, Latin America and Tunisia. Cooperation with Chinese organizations dated back to 1992.

The Institute depended on substantial financial assistance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), as well as from the Government of Malta. It was making special efforts to provide training in rural areas and would start using distance-learning techniques to enhance programmes.

HUGO IGNACIO LLANOS ([Chile](#)) said that, in its efforts to address the situation of older persons, Chile had participated in a meeting held in Brazil, where States of the region had worked towards the formulation of a relevant strategic framework. The Brasilia Declaration, which would promote the rights of older persons, also called for the creation of protection networks for older persons and enhanced efforts to eradicate discrimination against them.

He said his country had much experience dealing with the challenges of an ageing population, as well as in the promotion of their rights. Its population was ageing rapidly, and the Government had developed targeted social policies to address that demographic change. The Government was focused on, among other things, reducing the numbers of elderly people living in poverty, which would bolster the socio-economic situation of the entire country. It had also developed a plan that would ensure that elderly people were not abandoned or marginalized, but were instead empowered in the areas of decision-making that affected them.

On other initiatives, he said that, each year, the National Fund for the elderly presented plans, designed by older persons, targeting the ageing population. In 2007, the Fund had financed more than 2,000 projects. In addition, throughout the country, regional councils for the elderly had been set up to monitor the promotion and protection of elderly persons’ rights and to serve as forums to hear their concerns. A local social and health-care network had been established, which included the “Links” initiative, a programme to address the needs of elderly persons living in isolation and extreme poverty. Even with all that, the Government was aware that more work

needed to be done to disseminate information about older persons and to raise awareness about Chile's rapidly ageing population, which it stood ready to address.

CAO BINGLIANG (China) said that his country had begun implementing its eleventh five-year work programme for the elderly in 2006. Under the principle of "people first", the programme sought to improve the social security system and to safeguard the fundamental rights and interests of the elderly in the country's rapidly growing ageing population. People with disabilities were another vulnerable social group, whose rights and interests were being safeguarded with increased attention during China's recent years of rapid economic growth. Measures taken in that regard included improved legislation; the integration of people with disabilities into macro-economic and social development planning; the provision of equal opportunities; and the mobilization of actors to build partnerships. In October 2007, Shanghai had hosted the twelfth Special Olympics World Summer Games, and Beijing would host the thirteenth Paralympics in September 2008.

He said youth between the ages of 16 and 34 accounted for 33.6 per cent of all those employed in China. Measures were being taken to resolve employment problems facing them, including through vocational training and adoption of such policies as tax incentives and employment services for youth in urban areas, including business start-up schemes. Those and other proactive employment policies were guided by the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. As examples, the law on the protection of minors and the law on prevention of juvenile delinquency had been revised to provide legal and institutional guarantees for youth development and for the promotion and protection of their rights and interests.

Youth delegate YOUNG JOE HUR (Republic of Korea) said that the word "youth" was synonymous with "hope, potential and promise". Young people stood as the mirror of a country's future; however, despite the Commission's goal of providing full employment and decent work for all, almost half of the world's youth was unemployed. His country's unemployment rate hovered at around 10 per cent, with no sign of improvement.

He said that the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth was an effective way to improve that problem. Regarding youth unemployment, it was most urgent to address youth, who, finding the workplace futile, had fallen into delinquency. His country's policies focused on improving young people's job competency through such programmes as "job school", which allowed youth to experience actual circumstances of various jobs through individually tailored training programmes. The United Nations should delineate clear quality standards for legitimate youth employment, which could include the guarantee of minimum income and the provision of Government-level mentors.

Discussing the "double-edged sword" of information and communications technology, he said that, on the one hand, such technology contributed to online education, but on the other hand, it opened the door to Internet addiction, which had reached almost 5 per cent in his country. To cope with that phenomenon, his Government had implemented an "e-media diet", which encouraged youth to set time limits for use of cell phones, computers and television. Further, Korean youth had formed the Presidential Youth Congress to voice their concerns about domestic and international issues. As youth were the "spokes of a wheel" that moved the world forward, it was imperative that they played a role in the country's decision-making. Rather than see youth as who they will become, delegates should focus on youth today: "They are. They do. They become," he said.

ADRIANA GONZALES FURLONG (Mexico) said that, in its efforts to address the situation of older persons, her Government had, among other things, created a national institute for seniors, which monitored relevant policies and consolation-based initiatives designed to meet the needs of the elderly and improve their quality of life. In all its endeavours, Mexico aimed to improve care and training programmes and to boost the development of human and other resources for its ageing population. The country was benefiting from the training of the elderly population, in that its older people had become strong advocates for their own communities and were now working to raise awareness about ageing, elder care and the rights of older persons.

She said that other programmes had been designed to put the elderly on equal footing with others, and Mexico's President had recently signed a decree for tax incentives for those who contributed to support for the elderly. The Government was also promoting active ageing with relevant recreational and training programmes. A consultative body had also been set up to help the elderly in the area of decision-making. In addition, more than 6,000 community-level "clubs" had been created to assist older persons in their homes. A national centre for studies and health care had also been established in 2007, and Mexico had enhanced its databases on the elderly population. With that, follow-up indicators had been established to prepare policies for the well-being of the elderly in rural and urban contexts, in line with Madrid Action Plan and regional strategies.

CLAUDIA PEREZ ALVAREZ (Cuba) said that, despite the good intentions of participants at the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development, millions of people worldwide were still living in poverty, without health care or enough food to eat. That situation highlighted the unequal distribution of resources and "blind" market trading systems, which had led to the rich getting richer as the poor got poorer. Cuba, which had been "criminally blockaded" by the United States for 50 years, had not closed down one school or hospital and had not stopped providing social benefits to those in need. It had achieved full employment goals and had based its economic growth on fairness and justice for all.

She said her country was committed to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, including through a variety of programmes dealing with training, employment and social and scientific technical exchanges. There was a national council that monitored those and other activities. The Government had also been developing employment programmes and, since 2005, nearly 30,000 people with disabilities had entered various fields in the labour market. Still, Cuba was aware that, because of international inequalities, many people were prevented from living dignified lives with full safeguards of their fundamental rights. Cuba believed that the needs of people with disabilities should be included in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

BOBBY M. SAMAKAI, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Sport, Youth and Child Development of Zambia, said his country was fully committed to the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning disabled persons and had undertaken several measures in that regard. The Government had, among other things, designed a training policy that would enable persons with disabilities to have equal opportunities in vocational training programmes. Committed to the World Programme of Action for Youth, Zambia had continued to review policies, legislation and programmes. The best youth investment was education. Government measures in that regard included free basic education, revision of the curriculum to meet the demands of the labour market and promotion of life skills in schools. As alcohol and drug abuse was increasing, a substance abuse and prevention programme had also been included in the curriculum.

He said that a number of programmes had been developed to provide for the welfare of older persons, including the provision of financial, material and other support to organizations working with older persons. Also, a number of measures and initiatives had been undertaken in line with the objectives of the International Day of the Family. His country had made significant strides in addressing issues pertaining to the disabled, youth, the elderly and the family, but it still faced several challenges, such as the high incidence of HIV and AIDS, as well as the high poverty levels in the majority of households. He urged the international community to continue to develop and strengthen partnerships and to mobilize the necessary resources required to address those challenges.

ULLA STRÖM (Sweden) said several concerted actions were needed to meet the long-term challenges that the growing number of elderly posed to societies. Her country had gradually adjusted national policies to address those challenges, but it still had to deal with several issues in order to adapt the system to the needs and desires of the individual, rather than the other way around. Elderly people were too often looked upon as an economic burden and a strain on the health-care system. A change in attitude was necessary, and the demographic curve should be seen as a tremendous welfare achievement. When

discussing ageing societies, also important was to keep in mind that people now lived longer than before, because they were healthier and better educated.

She said that, regardless of the welfare system chosen by a country, the elderly should be treated with respect and dignity. “It has little to do with the economy and everything to do with attitudes,” she said. There was a lot to learn from each other, and her country would welcome an increased exchange of practices, experiences and knowledge about systems for social services and social protection, regionally as well as globally. Strong and united efforts were needed to achieve a society for all ages, where all people, regardless of age, were treated with respect and dignity.

SAMIR ALLAM (Egypt) said that, in his country, there were certain advantages for retirees, especially in the area of services. As long as a worker’s experience was required in the market, the employer needed the employee, regardless of whether the worker had reached retirement age. However, education programmes must be adapted, as there was no use for a graduate “educated” in matters that were not needed in the labour market. Indeed, market conditions were changing. The State guaranteed a salary for the family when a worker reached age 65 and care centres for the elderly existed. The State further cared for the elderly by providing social and health services for them after they retired.

CECILIE GOLDEN, representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), said she was deeply concerned with the marginalization of social groups. UNESCO’s midterm strategy for 2008-2013 emphasized the needs of Africa, gender equality, youth and the most vulnerable segments of society. Ageing and disabled populations were among those facing the most challenges. UNESCO strongly adhered to the Secretary-General’s report on the “First review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing: preliminary assessment”, which said that to achieve a better knowledge on ageing required translating accumulated research evidence into policy action. Research and policy were often disconnected at global, regional and national levels, and communication among policymakers and researchers was poor.

Explaining that a “synergy research policy” was at the heart of UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformation Programme, MASAMI EGAWA, also of UNESCO, said the Programme promoted a culture of evidence-based policymaking, and had organized, in collaboration with the Governments of Argentina and Uruguay, the International Forum on the Social Science Policy Nexus. Moreover, the Programme last week had organized a panel event with the Government of South Africa and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs on “Evidence-based policymaking to implement the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing”.

She went on to say that UNESCO led the global Education for All movement, aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015, through such goals as expanding early childhood care, providing free and compulsory education for all and promoting life skills for young people and adults. Inclusive schools must respond to the diverse needs of their students. UNESCO’s programme in that area promoted the right of education for children with disabilities, within the framework of general education.

TAREQ ARIFUL ISLAM (Bangladesh) said his country had recently ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and all Government actions and activities pertaining to disability were being realigned according to the Convention’s provisions. Developing countries were in urgent need of technical and financial support to integrate the Convention’s recommendations into national legislature and practice. Bangladesh’s current Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper included the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities. Among seven priority areas was implementing the current 10 per cent quota system in all public sector jobs, arranging for employment in the private sector and ensuring participation in decision-making processes.

He said that youths were potentially the most productive force in his country and the Government had adopted a national youth policy in line with the World Programme of Action for Youth. There was

also a Government family-based employment programme for youth, and Bangladesh had already achieved the Millennium Development Goal 3 target of gender parity in primary and secondary schools. Ageing, however, remained a problem for developing countries, and implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action required international and technical cooperation among Member States. There were some 5 million older persons in Bangladesh. The Government had introduced targeted programmes for the elderly, in line with the Madrid commitments. His country supported United Nations initiatives pertaining to family issues, in keeping with the Secretary-General's recommendations.

BARBARA MURRAY, Senior Specialist, Disability, Skills and Employability Department, International Labour Organization (ILO), said her organization saw the generation of decent work opportunities for older workers, youth and persons with disabilities as central to ensuring social protection for all. Enabling the three groups, representing a high proportion of those who were disadvantaged and socially excluded, to find and keep a decent job was the single most important means of combating their exclusion, as well as of ensuring that society would fully benefit from their talents.

She said several conditions must be met in order to make decent work a reality for each of those groups. Access to up-to-date skills and equal access to good employment services were key. Lifelong learning was increasingly relevant. Necessary measures to combat stereotypes and prevent discrimination with special attention to women workers were also crucial, as were safe and healthy working environments and sustainable and adequate social security. ILO would continue its work relating to persons with disabilities, youth and the elderly through, among other things, continued research, promotion of the relevant international labour standards and technical cooperation projects to develop capacity in less developed countries.

THELMA KAY, Chief, Emerging Social Issues Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), said that among its relevant activities, the Commission, in October, had convened a high-level regional review of the Madrid Plan in Macao, China. That meeting had reviewed developments in the area of ageing and addressed progress towards meeting the commitments of the Action Plan since 2002. The meeting had adopted the Macao Outcome Document, which was a set of recommendations for action that provided a coherent and concrete way forward on ageing matters for the Asia-Pacific region.

In addition, she said, working with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNFPA, the Commission had also organized, in Bangkok last year, a seminar on the "social, health and economic consequences of population ageing in the context of changing families". It had provided a comprehensive overview of those matters, focusing on the impact on families, which traditionally had provided support for their older relatives. On youth, the Commission had, among other initiatives, worked with the National Council of Youth Organizations in the Republic of Korea and held a regional youth policy seminar in Seoul last year. She highlighted several ESCAP-driven initiatives on disability, including a regional training workshop on "empowerment of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families", held in Shanghai, also last year. That "groundbreaking" workshop had been the first of its kind held by the Commission and had been convened in conjunction with the Special Olympics.

ROBERT LEIGH, Senior Policy Specialist, United Nations Volunteers, said that volunteer strategies sought to address, among other things, poverty reduction, sustainable development and health. Regarding full employment, he highlighted the link between volunteerism, employability and development, underscoring that volunteerism could help combat feelings of personal isolation for those experiencing social exclusion. For young people, it also meant acquiring skills and experience that could facilitate entry into the job market. Drawing attention to the *2007 United Nations World Youth Report's* finding that volunteering was among the most significant developments in addressing the issue of youth participation in sub-Saharan Africa, he said that policies for youth should take into account the value of ensuring meaningful opportunities to volunteer.

He said that, at the other end of the age spectrum, volunteering could help older people participate in society and enjoy healthier lifestyles. Against the backdrop of the Madrid Plan, he said that an enabling

environment for older persons to remain active through volunteering should be included in social policies. Moreover, strategies for achieving equality for persons with disabilities should consider contributions made through volunteering. The internet was opening enormous potential for them to volunteer online. The outcome of the General Assembly's twenty-fourth special session in 2000 on the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development had included volunteering as a vehicle for promoting social integration and, similarly, the Commission might consider including a reference to volunteerism in its outcome resolution.

ED RYAN, American Association of Retired People (AARP), said that, since its founding, the Association had served as a global source of information on the situation of older people and as a forum for information exchange on relevant policy matters. With that in mind, it stood ready to assist all Member States in the effort to achieve full employment and decent work for all. The Association was hosting a three-day briefing series during the Commission's current session, which would address, among other things, ways to enhance seniors' social protection and strengthening their participation in the labour market.

He said the Association was proud to have participated in the Anti-Age Discrimination Working Group, a consultative body, and it remained committed to all efforts to defend older persons against "employers who trafficked in the tired myths about older workers". At just past the five-year mark of the adoption of the Madrid International Plan on Ageing, the international community should be squarely focused on promoting the idea that working longer provided a wealth of opportunities -- for social integration, social protection and intergenerational solidarity. The Madrid Plan and the decent work agenda were two sides of the same coin; they represented linked platforms that could have profound impact on the future of ageing-related policies worldwide.

IRENE HOSKINS, International Federation on Ageing, was encouraged by the Secretary-General's report on the preliminary assessment of the first review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. Social protection was integral to the decent work agenda, and her organization was encouraged to see the growing list of countries that had implemented innovative forms of social protection for older people, namely social pensions, which were paid to older persons who would not normally be adequately covered by social security or other pension arrangements. Her organization planned to work actively with ILO, among others, to extend social pensions and other income security programmes.

In the context of geriatric training for health care workers, she supported WHO's dissemination of basic assessment and evaluation tools to primary health-care workers, as well as its efforts to address the quality of life of older people residing in cities. The right to adequate income security, access to age-friendly health care and an environment that fulfilled the needs of older people were closely linked to human rights considerations, which formed the basis of the Madrid Plan. Her organization had recently issued a new publication chronicling the body of United Nations-related and other resolutions containing a reference to the rights of older persons issued since 1948.

Youth delegate EEKKU AROMAA of the European Youth Forum and World Organization of the Scout Movement, described the experiences of Julia, Cekar and Isabel, three indigenous youth from rural areas of Central America, where access to primary education was not universal and many families could not afford to send their children to school. They had established a youth organization, in cooperation with a youth organization in Norway, and received grants to attend school. Today, Julia was a teacher and Cekar an engineer; they paid taxes, voted and were active in their communities. Their "New Stars" organization provided educational grants and supported victims of Hurricane Mitch.

From their stories, she said that States could learn that education was key to employment and development. Governments should provide educational access for all. Moreover, they must create an environment for young people to shape their work space. As youth organizations were important actors in policymaking, Governments should provide them with adequate funding. The resolution on youth adopted

at the General Assembly's last session and the Secretary-General's goals to support youth development in Member States would remain "nice words" without State actions. She urged States to make such tools part of national employment, education and youth policies. For their part, her delegation and other youth organizations stood ready to cooperate. It was important to ensure regionally balanced participation of youth-led organizations in the pursuit of such goals.

SÉKOU DIAKITÉ, Minister for Social Development, Solidarity and Older Persons of Mali, supporting Antigua and Barbuda's statement on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, said employment had "harshly tested" national policies that attempted to create solutions, especially for young people and women. He called for enhanced efforts to give full employment to those segments of the population and improve the environment for the private sector.

He said that Mali's employment policy outlined the establishment of a national action programme to reduce unemployment, especially for women, rural workers, informal workers and persons with disabilities. Decent employment was the main tool by which much of the population could rid itself of poverty. In the area of social promotion, the Government had adopted a plan to reform social security institutions and establish mandatory health insurance and medical assistance funds for those most in need.

Mali had implemented a re-adaptation programme together with civil society actors to promote the integration into society of persons with disabilities, he noted. A notable programme for youth was the national promotion programme for 2006-2008. Youth promotion had an economic and social dimension that underpinned stability and peace. Several challenges included the harmful effects of globalization and a lack of financial resources. He appealed to States to fulfil their commitments for official development assistance (ODA) and ensure the establishment of a fair trade system, which would help guarantee a more stable revenue stream for producers.

CLEMENT K. KHEMBO, Minister for Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly of Malawi, said that mainstreaming disability was the best way to promote the integration and inclusion of such persons in the country's national development. Towards that goal, the Constitution prohibited discrimination on the grounds of disability and its Employment Act provided for "equal work for equal pay" for such persons without discrimination. Further, Malawi had signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and was in the final stages of preparing for its ratification.

He said that the Government had introduced a wide range of policies and programmes to deal with the challenges arising from population ageing, including measures aimed at ensuring the participation of older persons in all levels of society, as well as a wealth of social protection initiatives. The President had demonstrated his political will to improve the situation of the elderly by establishing the Bingu Silvergery Foundation, which was cooperating with the Government to provide essential services to ensure that older persons enjoyed their last days with hope and dignity.

His Government also recognized the role of women in socio-economic development and had undertaken a number of relevant policy and legal measures, including passage of the Violence against Women Act in 2006, which prohibited all forms of discrimination against women, as well as all forms of violence against women, he said. Malawi was committed to the well-being and full development of its children, for which it had promoted capacity-building to upgrade their educational skills, among other things. While stressing Malawi's commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of all social groups, he noted that the Government still faced a lack of funds, inadequate training for implementation of programmes and limited interdepartmental cooperation. He called for greater cooperation with development partners to help address those pressing challenges.

CATHERINE BAKANG MBOCK, Minister for Social Affairs of Cameroon, said the Copenhagen Summit had demonstrated States' determination to see social development improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable: persons with disabilities; older persons; and women. One third of the working-age

population was unemployed or underemployed, while some 80 per cent of the global population had been deprived of access to social protections. Her country was most affected by such “doldrums”.

Nonetheless, she said, to promote full employment, her Government had approved a draft declaration of a national employment policy, and was developing a draft text on promoting labour-intensive activities and implementation of projects to roll back unemployment, including one to generate 25,000 jobs by 2010. The Government had also undertaken a study for persons with disabilities and launched a pilot programme in various ministries to support the integration of vulnerable persons.

On social development for older persons, she noted that her Government had recently drawn up a national policy on ageing and held a workshop for older persons. Regarding persons with disabilities, the Ministry for Social Affairs and the Ministry for Secondary Education had signed two circulars to integrate those with disabilities into the school system. Since 2005, Cameroon had provided equipment for disabled persons to boost their access to employment and granted subsidies to associations to train persons with disabilities. The country would sign the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the next few days. Youth unemployment was a particular problem. In closing, she reiterated the appeal for strengthened financial aid for development and capital flows for productive investment.

ADJAI HOUNGBEDJI (Benin) said the active employment sector in his country was overwhelmingly young. At the same time, much of the employment remained in the informal sector. In order to improve the labour market, which also lacked social protection networks and was marked by temporary, low-paying jobs, the Government believed it was important to put in place policies that were fully integrated into its poverty reduction programmes. A new educational programme had been implemented that aimed to target teaching to current market realities. The Government recognized the need to ensure that people were able to obtain jobs and compete in world labour markets. Between 2006 and 2007, relevant initiatives had helped usher several thousand young people into the work force.

Turning to persons with disabilities, he said that, last December, the Government had earmarked funds to help address the challenges faced by such persons. Last week, Benin had also signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Benin also believed in the need to support and promote full employment for women, and he appealed to all United Nations agencies, particularly ILO and the Bretton Woods institutions, to ensure decent work for all in the international efforts to ensure sustainable development, including the Millennium Development Goals.

MADHUBAN P. PAUDEL (Nepal) emphasized that policies to promote socio-economic status should focus on poverty eradication. Conditions of full employment in developing countries were achievable when developed countries adopted a more accommodative approach towards migrant workers from developing countries. Many initiatives had been undertaken in Nepal. The country's interim Constitution in 2007 had incorporated a rights-based approach to development as a State obligation.

He urged the international community to accelerate support -- primarily financial and technical assistance -- for least developed countries, notably those emerging from conflict.

Nepal was fully responsive to the needs of older persons and urged more collaboration at the national, regional and international levels to promote the Madrid Plan, he continued. Further, the country had recently signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. Touching on the interrelationship between family well-being and sustainable development, he said his country fully supported integrating a family perspective into policymaking and national capacity development.

SAN LWIN (Myanmar) said the current global economy and labour market challenged the implementation of full employment goals, particularly in developing countries, where much the

employment remained in the informal sector. It was clear that economic growth was not generating enough decent jobs. That situation was exacerbated by rapidly changing labour market trends, now focused largely on service sector and knowledge-based businesses. While the responsibility to ensure decent work rested with Governments, strong Government commitments and sound economic policies was not sufficient without adequate international cooperation and support to create an enabling environment for sustainable development, including through promoting opportunities for trade and investment, and providing access to information and communications technology.

He went on to say that his Government had been striving to meet its Millennium Development Goal targets, including poverty and hunger alleviation, largely through development strategies to be implemented with its own resources. It had also been actively trying to close the socio-economic gap between rural and urban areas. Its measures in that regard included development programmes for border areas where plans covered 24 special regional projects. The Government had also undertaken extensive infrastructure rehabilitation projects, including building roads and railway systems. In addition, the Government had stepped up efforts to strengthen Myanmar's education system, with programmes focused on technical training and training for disabled youth, among others.

SUSANTI HERLAMBANG, Director for Service and Social Rehabilitation, Ministry of Social Affairs of Indonesia, said that some 410 million older persons lived in the Asia-Pacific region, with estimates suggesting a jump to 733 million by 2025. In Indonesia, older persons numbered 16 million to 19 million people -- of the country's total population of 22 million -- and were estimated to reach 28.8 million people by 2020. The needs of such a large population group could not be ignored. The outcome document of the 2007 High-Level Meeting on Regional Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, held in Macao, China, pointed to the need for more vigorous action in priority areas concerning the development, health and supportive environments for older persons.

Indonesia was aware of the importance of tackling such challenges, she said, describing various laws and policies to ensure social protections for older people. The National Commissions for Older Persons had been set up, while the Ministry of Social Affairs managed programmes to promote good health and protection from poverty, including through the provision of social insurance for the very old. Also, more than 400 social organizations for the elderly, mostly headed by women, had undertaken activities funded by the communities in which they operated. A family empowerment programme trained family head of households to become entrepreneurs. For young people, the Government had created programmes that provided funds for them to finish school and become entrepreneurs.

HAMID CHABAR (Morocco) said his delegation hoped that the Commission's decision to consider its priority theme this year would lead to concrete action that would help States promote, in an effective way, decent work and full employment for all. Indeed, providing such employment was closely linked to efforts to fight poverty. It was necessary to recognize both national constraints, including lack of resources, and international constraints, such as the debt burden. It was important, therefore, to ensure proactive public policies.

He went on to emphasize the importance of reinterpreting the role of entrepreneurs, because it was the business and private sectors that created jobs. Also essential was to stress that the world's water resources should be considered when addressing sustainable social development for all. Developing human capital was also key, and Morocco had introduced a relevant plan in that regard, aiming to address development capacity at all levels of society. It also promoted the well-being and development of all social groups, including women and children, and focused on fighting social exclusion in rural areas and poverty in urban areas.

HABIB MANSOUR (Tunisia), noting that employment was integral to sustainable development, said his Government was tackling that issue within the context of an integrated, coherent national programme. Tunisia had reduced its unemployment rate and gaps in the indicators among its regions. However, work remained to be done, notably in offering employment to new graduates, whose numbers

had jumped to 208,000 in the 2002-2006 period. Tunisia's national experience was distinguished by various training and employment mechanisms, such as the National Fund for Employment and various youth employment programmes. Indeed, the country aimed to achieve strong economic growth that supported social progress.

Highlighting an annual growth rate of more than 5 per cent for 10 years, he said that 80 per cent of population belonged to the middle class. Such statistics revealed Tunisia's social development level, which had been achieved, in part, through social transfers. In 2007, women represented 26 per cent of the working population, with 42 per cent working in the medical field, 29 per cent as magistrates and 34 per cent as journalists. Moreover, about 1,800 company heads were women.

Turning to working conditions, he said social coverage was almost complete, with more than 95 per cent of the population receiving social security. To bring national legislation in line with international legislation, the country had ratified 58 international conventions, 8 of which concerned labour rights. He stressed the importance of education, training and skills, which needed constant updating to face challenges of globalization and competitiveness.

NASSIR ABDULAZIZ AL-NASSER (Qatar) said that in order to achieve sustainable, people-centred development, it was necessary to establish peace and security among States, promote the rule of law and all human rights and freedoms, including the right to development and gender equality, achieve transparency and fight corruption. Qatar believed it was important to implement strategies to enhance the participation of youth in society, including through education and training.

He said that Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint-Nasser al-Misnad, as the Special Envoy for Higher Education for UNESCO, had sought to boost interest in the situation of the world's children. She had recently announced the creation of "Your Link", a youth employment initiative aimed at creating job opportunities for young people in the Middle East and North Africa. That initiative would, among other things, help create job opportunities, enhance training and encourage the targeted youth to start their own businesses.

On persons with disabilities, he said his Government had worked hard to create an institutional framework to provide for their care, for which it had committed itself to the United Nations Standard Rules on Equality of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. It had also acceded to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. While the Convention was critically important, ratifying it did not necessarily mean that attitudes towards persons with disabilities would change or that their rights would be fully respected. There was a need, therefore, to further monitor the implementation of the Standard Rules as the most appropriate operational mechanism to measure the achievement of equal opportunities and to consider the Convention as a legal framework that stipulated and protected the rights of people with disabilities.

VUSI MADONSELA, Director-General of the Department of Social Development of South Africa, said the history of apartheid had resulted in the social exclusion and deliberate deprivation of most of the country's people. Reversing that legacy remained the Government's "single most daunting task". As access to social security had been racially biased until 1994, the country today was consolidating the goals of social development, poverty eradication and the creation of an enabling economic environment that reflected ethical values, as it promoted the betterment of the human condition within the context of sustainable social development. He acknowledged the importance of an integrated approach to the outcomes of Copenhagen, the General Assembly's twenty-fourth special session and the 10-year review of the World Summit on Social Development.

Against the backdrop of the World Programme of Action for Youth, he discussed the need to address poverty, unemployment and HIV and AIDS, which prevented young peoples from participating in the labour market. Government implementation of policies for employment and labour mobility — complemented by corporate social responsibility — was important. Partnerships between Government and

the corporate sector could be carried out through entrepreneurship and capacity-building programmes. Regarding the elderly, South Africa had made progress in 2006, when Parliament had passed the Older Person Act, which sought to promote their status, rights, well-being and safety. Poverty persisted, although the country continued to strengthen its work in such areas as comprehensive social security, social welfare services and social policy, among others.

EDWIN WALKER, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, said that, more than at any time in history, today it was critical to address the issue of global ageing. In the United States, 23 adults turned 65 every five minutes and, in less than 20 years, that number was expected to double. Worldwide, it was expected that, very soon, people over 65 would outnumber children under 5. By 2030, the world was expected to have 1 billion older people — 13 per cent of the total population.

He said the “oldest old”, traditionally 85 and older, were now the fastest growing segment of the global population. That was significant, because that population group had higher levels of disability and, therefore, required long-term health care. That increased need had implications for pension plans and retirement income, and foreshadowed major increases in health care costs if States did not act now to change their systems of care. The United States was working diligently to address such long-term challenges and, among other things, in 2001, President George Bush had begun the New Freedom Initiative as part of a nationwide effort to remove barriers to community living for people with disabilities. The President had called for a fundamental rebalancing of the country’s health-care system to emphasize community care and giving people more choices and control over their care options.

By example, he said that Americans living with disabilities should not be forced to live in nursing homes or other facilities. Community alternatives should be made available for those who did not need institutional care. Overall, the policy strategy of the United States was to make the country’s system of care more responsive to the needs and preferences of its citizens and, ultimately, more cost effective for all. The United States was doing that by empowering citizens with more choices and control over their health care, including increased control over the types of benefits and care they received and the manner in which those benefits and care were delivered.

JUAN ANTONIO YÁÑEZ-BARNUEVO (Spain), agreeing with Slovenia’s statement on behalf of the European Union, said that Spain’s commitment to social policies was designed to meet the goals of social integration, enhancement of rights and the full guarantee of those rights. Progress had been made with the entry into force last year of a law on promoting personal autonomy and care for those in situations of dependency. The law outlined rights for those who could not care for themselves, either due to old age or disability, entitling them to Government care. The new system would care for more than 1 million dependent individuals, and it had received consensus support from businesses, trade associations, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Any dependency law should be implemented according to the Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities. Spain was among the first to have ratified that instrument and its Optional Protocol.

Since the 2002 Madrid Plan, he said, his country had conducted annual seminars to consider progress and problems of the elderly. In that process, Spain and the Economic Commission for Europe had organized a ministerial conference at León, during which Spain had promoted the elderly with a forum that had included civil society representatives. Along those lines, Spain also had proposed the creation of a working group within the Economic Commission for Europe to advance implementation of the Berlin Strategy.

Highlighting the Santiago Declaration adopted at the seventeenth Ibero-American Summit in 2007, he said that Spain had committed itself to Ibero-American cooperation by promoting programmes for comprehensive development. In that context, he drew attention to the Ibero-American Technical Cooperation Network, which aimed to develop policies to care for the elderly and those with disabilities.

FREDERICO BARRIOS (Paraguay) said his Government had adopted plans and programmes to ensure social integration and the protection of vulnerable groups. Most of the employment in the developing world was in the informal sector and did not allow families to breach the poverty barriers. With that in mind, Paraguay had introduced a host of complementary policies that addressed social protection for families living in extreme poverty. Policies to promote the employability of youth and women living in rural and marginal urban areas had also been targeted. Other policies had been geared towards self-employed persons. Paraguay had also focused on “employability training” to enhance opportunities to obtain gainful work. Those policies also promoted the employability and training of persons with disabilities.

At the same time, he said, the international community must work together to reverse the impact of globalization on current world labour markets, especially in developing countries. His country supported recent proposals to establish specific goals and targets for decent work for all, particularly the creation of a new target under Millennium Goal 1. The situation of migrant workers and other vulnerable groups should also be addressed. Measures should be targeted to specific groups and seek to boost social and economic integration and promotion.

GILLES NOGHÈS (Monaco) said the conclusions of the report relating to the Madrid Plan of Action had shown that, in some developing countries, ageing issues had only recently been taken into account in national policymaking. Developed countries must take into consideration the interaction of ageing, migration, and economic competitiveness. Noting that progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals would soon be considered, he pointed out that the status of the elderly would figure into that discussion.

For its part, Monaco had undertaken various measures in line with the Madrid action plan, notably through individual and institutional autonomy allowances, he said. A centre for clinical gerontology was also being designed for those suffering from Alzheimer’s, and would be operational by 2010. Monaco would continue its initiatives to promote high-quality care for the elderly, in line with the expressed will of Prince Albert II.

MARIE-LAURENCE PÉAN MEVS (Haiti) said that eradication of poverty, full employment generation and social integration were priorities for her Government, which had drawn on civil society and the private sector to assist in addressing challenges. Above all, the Government was striving to strengthen the education system countrywide, particularly in rural areas. It was also setting up innovative projects to train young people in the use of new information and communication technology and better help them obtain decent work in the global labour market.

Turning to the situation of persons with disabilities, she said that nearly 10 per cent of Haiti’s population lived with some form of disability. Though Haiti had not become a party to the Convention, it had spearheaded an aggressive mode of social policymaking to ensure that the rights of the country’s disabled were respected. A National Council on the Participation of Persons with Disabilities monitored national efforts. The Government recognized the need to promote the rights of special social groups, while simultaneously addressing the country’s pressing development needs. Towards that end, Haiti called on the international community to stand by its commitments to ensure that all countries achieved globally-agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

TAHIRIH NAYLOR, Baha’i International Community, said that policies aimed at tackling unemployment and providing decent and secure work for all must go beyond addressing mere economic concerns and deal with the human and social dimensions of employment. Towards that goal, the international community must not view unemployed persons as “a problem”, but as a resource that could be tapped in order to achieve national priorities, as well the Millennium Goals. Work, no matter how simple, was a means to advance human development. Baha’i hoped that keeping those things in mind could expand the vision of workers, the private sector, Governments and other agencies. Hopefully, that broad

vision of work would inform all policies adopted at national and international levels towards the promotion of decent work and full employment for all.

BRENDA CALLIGAN, Elizabeth Seton Federation, speaking with the support of all non-governmental organizations participating in the Commission's work, said that putting people at the centre of development implied ensuring decent work and gainful employment for all. Those were the first steps in ensuring a decent life for every member of society. With that in mind, the Foundation and participating civil society groups called for, among other things, a strong resolution on the priority theme, along with a well-defined follow-up mechanism.

She said that such a mechanism should include a regular review of implementation of the outcome of the policy session to be presented to the Commission's forty-ninth session. The civil society participants had also encouraged the development of decent work indicators under a new target under Millennium Development Goal 1. Finally, they recommended that the subject of full employment be taken up as a thematic debate in the General Assembly.

The representative of Foundation Chatal Biya explained that his organization, based in Cameroon, worked to assist the elderly, persons with disabilities, abandoned children and victims of natural disasters, among others. The organization had established a centre for mothers and children, and 1,300 patients had been seen in 2007, an increase over the previous year. He said that the mortality rate of hospitalized patients had fallen. The organization also had established an endoscopy centre in Yaounde. In 2007, much of the work had focused on medical assistance during surgery. Several field trips had also been made to visit indigenous and pygmy populations.

The representative of HelpAge International, a global network for older persons, said that official meetings with Member States had emphasized that, although progress had been made in implementing the Madrid Plan, commitment was uneven and disappointing. There had been insufficient attention paid to women and older persons. Older persons still lacked economic security. They must be respected for who they are. The Brasilia Declaration on ageing had requested the Human Rights Council to consider appointing a special rapporteur to represent the interests of older persons, which would be an important development.

SUSAN SOMERS, International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, said that throughout the world, abuse and neglect of older persons was largely under-recognized or treated as an unspoken problem. Older persons were marginalized, seen as burdens, and their needs were largely invisible in the societies in which they lived. Older persons must have a voice, she said, stressing that her organization saw elder abuse as a health and human rights issue. Governments had the responsibility to protect vulnerable older persons. At the same time, raising awareness of the cultural, social, economic and demographic processes affecting older people required the joint activities of Governments, as well as civil society, educational institutions, religious groups and older persons themselves.

GAYON SETTON, Global Youth Action Network, on behalf of other youth organizations attending the Commission, said that, while the statements by Government delegations during the past three days had focused on the situation of young people, the outcome resolution under consideration, as it currently stood, touched on the subject in only two paragraphs. She said that youth groups were troubled by this, and hoped that the draft resolution would ultimately address, in a concrete manner, many of the serious issues that were being discussed.

Among other things, NAMDIM SOBHANI, also with the Global Youth Action Network, said the organization would call on strong efforts by Governments to bridge the education to employment gap, address the needs of marginalized youth and support them in ways that were targeted to their needs, and promote the creation of an enabling environment that supported youth entrepreneurship.

LILA PROUNIS, Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan of North and South America, said that her organization believed that the Commission should focus on efforts to strengthen -- and comprehensively support -- families as a means to lessening social vulnerabilities. Increased awareness of the concerns and stresses families encountered when work and family needs were not balanced was also necessary. The family was vital to ensuring the skills necessary for young people to become better workers and citizens. Families could also help prevent social ills, such as child labour and exploitation. Governments should supplement training so that children could get additional skills that they did not get in school. Further promoting volunteer work was also important, she added