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GENERAL ASSEMBLY REVIEWS GLOBAL ACTION PLAN ON YOUTH, URGES GOVERNMENTS TO BOOST

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, MORE EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS THEIR CONCERNS

With young men and women around the world living in countries at different stages of development and in different socio-economic situations, the General Assembly today urged Governments to partner with the United Nations and civil society to develop policies and programmes that more effectively addressed the problems of young people in the twenty-first century and boosted opportunities for their participation in society.

By the adoption of a new resolution, the Assembly called on Governments and civic actors to base their initiatives on an agreed international strategy -- the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond -- which provided a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of youth, hundreds of millions of whom lived on less than \$2 a day, faced high levels of unemployment or suffered inequities in social, economic and political conditions.

The Assembly's action followed up its decision in 1995 to mark the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year, and strengthen its commitment to young people by directing the international community's response to the challenges to youth into the next millennium. It did that by adopting the World Programme of Action, which highlighted 10 priority areas: education; employment; hunger and poverty; health; environment; drug abuse; juvenile delinquency; leisure time activities; girls and young women; and full and effective participation in society and in decision-making.

Today, the Assembly decided to add as additional priority areas for the implementation of the Programme: the mixed impact of globalization on young men and women; the use of and access to new information technologies; the dramatic increase of HIV infections among youths and the impact of the epidemic on their lives; the active involvement of young people in armed conflict, both as victims and as perpetrators; and the increased importance of addressing intergenerational issues in an ageing society.

The adoption of the resolution capped the Assembly's day-long debate, which featured young men and women serving as delegates representing nearly two dozen countries, calling for a better awareness of the global situation of young people, as well as improved efforts to promote their rights and aspirations. They stressed that the majority of the world youth population -- defined by the United Nations as between the ages of 15 and 24 -- lived in developing countries, and that there should be a major push to enhance education and training, and provide viable employment, health and social services.

Opening the meeting, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette said that, since 1995, dramatic changes had taken place that had had profound effects on the lives of young people -- from the impact of globalization and the rapid development of information and communication technology to the devastating spread of HIV/AIDS.

"These upheavals only serve to underline the need for young people to be involved in decisions that affect their lives -- a principle that forms one of the priorities of the World Programme of Action", she said, adding that above all, she hoped today's meeting would be

followed by concrete action on the ground where it mattered most. “Real youth participation must come at every level -- locally, regionally, and nationally”, she said.

Among the young people who echoed that sentiment, Jamaica’s representative said that, to institutionalize the participation and involvement of youth, the United Nations should establish permanent youth representatives as part of a youth ambassador programme. If the participation of youth was to amount to more than tokenism, officials at the highest level of the United Nations must engage young men and women in meaningful dialogue. He also called for a shadow “Youth Secretary-General” appointed to work on a full-time basis with the United Nations Secretary-General and charged with ensuring that the priorities of the Programme of Action were met.

Addressing on-the-ground priorities, Ghana’s youth delegate said that young people in his country, like so many others in Africa, benefited least from globalization. For that reason, issues regarding unfair trade and competition must be seriously addressed. It was also important to ensure that the lion’s share of resources aimed at solving youth unemployment was directed to regions with a larger percentage of young people, such as Asia and Africa. Further, he said that well-coordinated and intensive exchange programmes between youth organizations of the North and South were also needed.

Spotlighting another critical issue, Azerbaijan’s youth representative said that poverty represented a serious threat to the security and well-being of young people, depriving them of education and employment opportunities, and making them vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation. Young people wanted to make their own contribution, rather than just be a group for which employment must be found, he said, stressing that they wanted to partake in the process and be partners for development.

Sweden’s representative asked delegations to imagine a world where millions of people did not die before the age of 20 as a result of poverty, pregnancy, conflict, lack of health services or HIV/AIDS; and where young women and men were able to read, obtain decent work with a decent salary, seek their identity without fear of discrimination, and make their voices heard. Young people were being marginalized when Governments did not respect their right to health, education and decent work, or when they were not allowed to express their sexual, religious or indigenous identity without fear for their lives.

At the outset of the meeting, Assembly President Jan Eliasson (Sweden) addressed delegates, and Mexico’s youth delegate summarized the outcome of yesterday’s round table on youth.

Also addressing the Assembly today were the youth representatives of the United Kingdom (on behalf of the European Union), Switzerland, Pakistan, China, Australia, Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Turkey, Portugal, United Republic of Tanzania, Canada, Brazil, Denmark, Croatia, Georgia and Haiti.

The meeting was also addressed by Government officials and representatives from Mozambique (on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)), Argentina (on behalf of the Rio Group), Malaysia, Sweden, Costa Rica, Egypt, Cuba, Tunisia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Peru, Guatemala, Thailand, Japan, Sudan, India, Indonesia, Singapore, Nepal, Viet Nam, Sri Lanka, Algeria, Malawi, El Salvador, Venezuela, Mexico, San Marino, Syria, Togo, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Nicaragua.

The representative of Portugal introduced the draft resolution on policies and programs involving youth.

The Observer of the Holy See and the representative of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) also spoke.

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply were the representatives of the United States and Cuba. Speaking in explanation of position after the adoption of the resolution was the representative of Venezuela.

The General Assembly will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Monday, 10 October to elect five non-permanent members of the Security Council.

Background

The General Assembly met today to evaluate progress made in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by Member States in 1995.

Among the reports before the Assembly is a report of the Secretary-General entitled World Youth Report (2005) (document A/60/61-E/2005/7), which discusses efforts to implement the initiatives and programmes identified by the 1995 World Programme of Action. It also addresses five new areas of concern, including the mixed impact of globalization on young men and women; the use of and access to new information technologies; the dramatic increase of HIV infections among youths and the impact of the epidemic on their lives; the unprecedented involvement of young people in armed conflict; and the increased importance of addressing inter-generational issues in an ageing society.

According to the report, more than 200 million of the world's youth are living in poverty; 88 million are unemployed; 130 million are illiterate; and 10 million are living with HIV/AIDS. Youth policies around the world are too often driven by negative stereotypes of delinquency, drug abuse and violence. Governments need to develop more integrated policies for addressing the needs of young people, as well as children, who will become the youth of tomorrow. Young people themselves should be involved in evaluating these policies, and should also be given a greater role in the general political decision-making process. One way this could be accomplished is by including more youth representatives in delegations to the Assembly and other United Nations meetings.

The report indicates a need for greater funding for initiatives aimed at fighting poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and HIV/AIDS among members of this generation. It also identified a need for better tracking of the conditions affecting young people. It suggests, for example, setting up a youth development index that would compile data on health, educational status and income. With the efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals providing a perfect opportunity for gathering such data, the report suggests that the Assembly ask the Secretariat to develop such a set of indicators.

The Secretary-General's report on global analysis and evaluation of national action plans on youth employment (A/60/133) provides an overview of the challenges relating to youth employment in the context of the Millennium Declaration and the international agenda on development and collective security. It encompasses an analysis and evaluation of 39 national action plans on youth employment, exploring the policies, programmes and development of these plans. It also includes a series of recommendations on the role of the Secretary General's Youth Employment Network as a catalyst for youth employment.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are approximately 88 million young men and women who are unemployed throughout the world, and many more who work long hours for low pay. The youth share of unemployment is 47 per cent and youth make up only 25 per cent of the world's population. While there is not one single cause for youth unemployment, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has been a major factor in increasing youth unemployment, especially among young women. Rates of unemployment among young people are highest in Western Asia, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

With some 1.2 billion young people expected to enter the working age population over the next decade, the social, economic and political costs of youth unemployment are tremendous. Therefore, the 39 national reports and action plans of the countries addressing this issue have been integrated to identify four key priorities: employability, entrepreneurship, equal opportunities, and employment creation. These countries are focusing on objectives such as upgrading and increasing funding for vocational programs, training and on-the-job experience programmes, and the creation of employment opportunities, not just on a quantitative level, but qualitative as well, in order to match the skills of youth joining the labour market.

Also before the Assembly is the report of the Secretary-General on making commitments matter: young people's input to the 10-year review of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (document A/60/156), in which the Secretary-General gives a synopsis of the evaluations of youth organizations and youth representatives on the progress made and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Programme of Action. There were numerous responses, indicating that youth considered the Programme relevant, states the report. The respondents made three broad points: that improvement of the situation of young people was contingent on the fulfilment of their basic human rights; that cross-sectoral national youth policies ought to be created; and that the Programme ought to be linked with the Millennium Goals.

The youth noted that they still suffered from widespread hunger and poverty. They sought more education, more support for entrepreneurial efforts, help for young farmers and the incorporation of the principles of sustainable development into approaches to tackling poverty and hunger among youth. Insufficient progress had been made towards the Education for All goals. There was also a danger that complacency might arise from the notion that more young people than ever were educated. Youth urged development of alternative forms of education, that their formal educations include life-skills training, and a greater emphasis on tracking drop-out rates than on enrolment rates.

On matters related to youth at risk, the report notes that health services needed to be more youth oriented and health curricula needed to be incorporated in their formal educations. Governments ought to be involved in efforts to promote life skills and positive self-development to prevent juvenile delinquency. Youth sought to end capital punishment for youth and youths' access to arms had to be limited. Drugs were a multi-faceted problem that should be addressed through its root causes, and HIV/AIDS remained a critical concern. Conflict resolution should be a part of formal education and youth could serve as eloquent educators for peace.

By the terms of a draft resolution on policies and programmes involving youth (document A/60/L.2), the Assembly would urge Governments, in consultation with youth organizations, to develop holistic and integrated policies based on the World Programme for Youth and to evaluate them regularly as part of follow-up action on the Programme's implementation. It would also decide to add as additional priority areas for the implementation of the Programme of Action: the mixed impact of globalization on young men and women; the use of and access to new information technologies; the dramatic increase of HIV infections among youths and the impact of the epidemic on their lives; the active involvement of young people in armed conflict, both as victims and as perpetrators; and the increased importance of addressing inter-generational issues in an ageing society.

In addition, the Assembly would welcome the commitment contained in the outcome document of the 2005 World Summit to make the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for young people a central objective of relevant national and regional policies, as well as national development strategies, including poverty reduction strategies. A related provision would have the Assembly stress the importance of the Youth Employment Network as a peer exchange, support and review mechanism, and encourage Member States and the United Nations to expand the Network at all levels.

Opening Statements

JAN ELIASSON (Sweden), President of the General Assembly, said the presence of a record number of youth representatives in today's meeting was concrete evidence of the revitalization and rejuvenation so often called for in the Assembly Hall. It was also an indication of the recognition that the participation of youth was important in implementing and evaluating the 10-year-old World Programme of Action for Youth. Despite the great progress made in the past 10 years, meeting the challenges still facing young people would need substantive commitment and action in emerging areas of concern.

In addition to policies and programmes developed specifically for youth, he continued, the needs of young people must be better reflected in broader development agendas. World leaders at the recent Summit had reviewed the Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations reform process. Intensified commitment and investment towards meeting the Goals would have enormous benefits for the young people of 2015 and for future generations. As one youth delegate had said in yesterday's round table, the current generation should not be the next one to fail in meeting the Goals but the first to succeed.

LOUISE FRÉCHETTE, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, said "Just as the United Nations Charter was written for succeeding generations, so is our present agenda intended to give those who succeed us a chance to build better lives". Today, almost half the world's population was less than 25 years old. The basic challenges they already faced included the 200 million youth living in poverty and the 10 million young people living with HIV/AIDS. She stressed the need to redouble efforts to reach the Millennium Goals.

Noting the challenges facing young people, she said the upheavals of the modern world underlined the need for young people to be involved in decisions that affected their lives. The Assembly was putting that principle into practice by inviting youth to address it today. The symbolic occasion should be followed by concrete action on the ground in the world outside

where it mattered most. Youth must be involved at the local, regional and national levels as partners in reaching the Goals and in building a more peaceful, democratic and prosperous world.

Summary of Round Table on Youth

ITZEL BARRERA DE DIEGO, youth delegate of Mexico, summarized the outcome of the round table on youth held yesterday. Among the topics discussed were the marginalization of young people resulting from the lack of universal quality education and poor access to new communication technologies, as well as efforts to decrease the gap between urban and rural development. She proposed establishing a volunteer-based Youth Advisory Council to the United Nations, whose mandate would include bringing young delegates to participate in General Assembly sessions. She also called for the creation of youth councils at the national level that would be able to offer the perspective of young people in policy-making.

She said youth meant potential energy and solutions, and that potential energy had to be harnessed. She urged institutionalised participation of young people at all levels of national Government, and supported the elaboration of a United Nations convention on the rights of youth. Many generations had had the opportunity to eradicate poverty, but today's generation would be the first to succeed.

Introduction of Draft Resolution

JOÃO MANUEL GUERRA SALGUEIRO (Portugal) introduced draft resolution A/60/L.2 on the policies and programmes involving youth. He said the presence of so many youth representatives in the Assembly today was a testimony to the valuable role and input that young people could have to the work of the Organization and to society as a whole. "Young people must be heard, they must be considered as part of the solution and not as the problem."

He also introduced two revisions to the text, including the addition of a new operative paragraph 11, which would have the Assembly call on Governments, the United Nations system, youth organizations and other relevant stakeholders, to strengthen efforts aimed at the implementation of the 10 priority areas, contained in the World Programme.

Statements

KRISTOFER MCGHEE, youth delegate of the United Kingdom, delivering a statement on behalf of the European Union, welcomed progress that had been made in the past decade towards the achievement of goals related to the well-being of young people. However, he noted there were many more challenges yet to be met. One of the crucial steps that had to be taken was to more fully integrate the special needs of youth in efforts to achieve the Millennium Goals. Youth must also be more involved in the process of identifying problems and devising and implementing solutions. Youth employment, and in particular employment for young women, was one of the major issues that had to be addressed. Integral to any efforts to provide youth employment was providing quality education for all children.

The incorporation of youth in decision-making processes and their participation in international forums was crucial for achieving goals related to youth and to combat negative prejudices and stereotypes, he continued. The 200 million young people living in poverty, the 88 million unemployed, and the 10 million living with HIV/AIDS demanded a renewed commitment to the World Programme of Action. Youth delegates from the United Kingdom particularly sought education in life skills and in living an independent life, as well as sex education. They urged a greater role for young people in achieving goals related to improving the lives of young people.

HENRIQUE BANZE, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mozambique, speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said the members of SADC wanted the tenth anniversary meeting of the World Programme of Action on Youth to be not just an opportunity for review and appraisal, but a platform for rededication to the 10 priority areas identified by the Assembly in the World Programme. The member countries of the SADC had made significant progress in the area of youth development and empowerment. He cited partnerships with civil society organizations, the private sector and the United Nations that led to programmes to help develop the skills and capacities of young people.

Focusing on the difficult issues confronting youth in the years ahead, he said that the 113 million children still currently out of school was of genuine concern, and the need to enforce universal access to education required further funding from development partners. As youth

unemployment remained one of the Community's biggest problems, member countries had been promoting productive and decent employment for youth through entrepreneurial training, micro-credit schemes, vocational training and career guidance programmes.

He added that the girl child, "the woman of tomorrow", still faced a plethora of problems and hardships. In its attempt to highlight the plight of the girl child, SADC members had presented a resolution on the issue which was considered every two years by the Assembly. He called on all Member States to continue to support the resolution to be introduced during the current session of the Assembly, whose sole intention was to give real meaning to the life of girls across the globe.

MARIA FABIANA LOGUZZO (Argentina), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that while the issues outlined in the World Programme of Action were still pertinent, there were now other issues that had to be considered as well. Those included globalization, access to new technologies, the spread of HIV/AIDS, natural disasters and the expansion of armed conflict. Providing employment for youth was a critical goal, but it had to be pursued always with an eye to balancing the need to keep children in school as long as possible. Employment, to the degree possible, should not interfere with the education of young people. HIV/AIDS remained a pressing concern and one of the best methods of combating its spread was sex and health education. Anti-drug education was also needed.

Some members of the Rio Group, she said, had created organizations through which youth could participate in shaping responses to the problems they faced. Youth ought to be more involved in the process. Given the budgetary constraints, the Group hoped that, after the adoption of the resolution today, there would in the future be more participation by youth in meetings such as today's by means of, among other things, resources from the United Nations Youth Fund.

AZALINA OTHMAN SAID, Minister of Youth and Sports of Malaysia, said her country's National Youth Council had acted for more than 30 years as a "youth parliament", providing a forum for both Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to meet, discuss and debate issues concerning youth development programmes. In 1985, in conjunction with the United Nations International Youth Year, Malaysia created a nationwide youth policy -- updated in 1997 and renamed the National Youth Development Policy -- which provided guidelines to formulate and implement programmes.

To harness the potential of the younger generation, Malaysia had developed a strategy based on leadership training, acquisition of vocational and technical skills and entrepreneurship, she continued. In politics, greater efforts were now being geared towards recruiting youth to participate in the political process and grooming them to be future leaders throughout the country. At the same time, Malaysia was actively trying to accommodate the increasing numbers of young graduates -- the bulk of the country's unemployed population -- by creating numerous vocational training and learning centres, which worked alongside the Youth Ministry's own National Skills Training Institutes.

Like other nations, Malaysia had not been spared the social maladies that accompanied growth and development, including the looming threat of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, premarital sex, teenage pregnancy, and religious extremism, among others, she said. To counter those social ills, since 1994, the Government created several youth outreach and sports programmes to help young people use their time productively, to help them cope with and confront modern challenges, and avoid drugs. She concluded by calling on the United Nations to strengthen its youth-centred organs, continue to promote youth participation in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and other forums, and establish a youth fund within the World Economic Forum to provide financial assistance to boost youth entrepreneurship, among other things.

LENA HALLENGREN, Minister for Youth Affairs of Sweden, said she was often asked why a specific youth policy was needed. Her answer was always that it was because youth were facing similar challenges in obtaining a good education, establishing themselves on the labour market and getting their first own place to live. The Swedish Government and the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations strongly supported a reaffirmation of the World Programme of Action for Youth and attached critical importance to the five additional areas identified in the World Youth Report. In periods of economic recession, youth were among the most negatively affected. For that reason, promoting youth employment was one of the top priorities for the Swedish Government. From the local to the international level, meaningful commitments and concrete action were needed. Youth and their organizations should play a leading role in that work.

HANNA HALLIN, youth representative for Sweden, asked delegations to imagine a world where millions of young people did not die before the age of 20 as a result of poverty, pregnancy, conflict, lack of health services or HIV/AIDS; and where young women and men were able to read, obtain decent work with a decent salary, seek their identity without fear of discrimination, and make their voices heard. She said Governments must continue to include youth representatives in their national delegations and allow them to participate fully. Young people were today a major force in global development and were initiating a vast number of projects to improve life in their communities. Those initiatives must be facilitated and turned into partnerships with Governments and non-governmental organisations.

She said young people were being marginalized when Governments did not respect their right to health, education and decent work, or when they were not allowed to express their sexual, religious or indigenous identity without fear for their lives. Every national youth policy should include measurable goals on how to improve the situation of all young people, with special attention to marginalized youth.

YUAN YAO, youth delegate of Switzerland, said there were still not enough young people in the Assembly. Too many were having to watch while decisions on their future were made. The needs of youth had never been so precisely defined as they had been now, but action was still lacking. Hopefully, more States would focus on that need and include youth in the decision-making process.

She said nearly one in four young people demonstrated behavioural problems. While the causes varied, all of those affected needed a useful occupation within a solid social network. Access to education, job training and employment security enabled youth to find their place in society. "We need to have healthy youth to build a healthy society." To address the spread of mental problems among young people, national preventive programmes, as well as local and regional plans of action, were needed. "Please involve youth in these processes. We want to participate and be partners."

HERNAN SOLANO, Deputy Minister for Youth of Costa Rica, said concrete action had to be taken to ensure youth's participation in decision-making, as well as to address the problems outlined in the World Programme of Action. Education, health, employment and participation were the four main areas of concern. Costa Rica had established a programme to include young people in decision-making processes, of which it was proud. Official delegations to the United Nations should include youth representatives. That was particularly important in delegations from developing countries.

Maximizing the potential of youth, he said, required a focus on efforts in developing countries because 80 per cent of the world's youth lived in developing countries. The 80 million unemployed youth around the world represented a waste of resources that had to be addressed. Youth participation was also required to battle the scourge of HIV/AIDS. In addition, the fact that youth represented a large part of the criminal population was of great concern. The Programme of Action, adopted 10 years ago, was still relevant but the world had changed and the five additional priorities that had been outlined ought to be included in the Programme.

FAHR AHMED, youth delegate from Pakistan, said that while Pakistan's economy had grown at a healthy rate for the past five years, there were still serious constraints on Government spending for youth and social welfare. The Government was trying to tackle the problems of poverty and unemployment with scarce resources. In support of many efforts by youth to establish small businesses, especially in the area of information technology, the Government had established a new authority to promote small businesses. Also, bank loans had been extended to the unemployed in rural regions. A special project had been launched to provide meals for girl students and another programme had provided them with uniforms, textbooks and stipends. Islam had elevated the status of women but more had to be done to ensure their education and their greater participation in public life.

JIANG GUANGPING, youth delegate from China, said the past 10 years had brought important changes to his country due to reforms, including new programmes to address the challenges facing young people. Progress had been made but new issues had also emerged, such as intergenerational problems that were both specific to China and also global in nature. To fully benefit their young people, Governments should invest in youth from a long-term perspective and should support programmes for them. They should address the negative impacts of globalization with an eye towards the welfare of their youth, and corporations should step up and do their part. States should work together to develop a dialogue aimed at helping youth worldwide since they were not just the future but also the present.

MAI TAHA MOHAMED KHALIL (Egypt) said the most important issue affecting young people was employment, which created the foundation for a solid economic and social structure and a better standard of living. It was also a key part of preventing the involvement of youth in illegal activities, including terrorism. Creating more employment was a challenge to the international community as a whole, part of the continued responsibility to development and a key to solving transnational problems, terrorism, and racism towards migrants.

She said the market economy, if wisely directed, could produce huge productive capabilities and achieve material progress on an unprecedented scale. However, those ambitions were far from being realized. Globalization did not evenly distribute resources. Many people did not have their voices heard in determining the path of development, and globalization had not realized their ambition for better jobs.

She said the Egyptian Government paid attention to unemployment and tried to come up with adequate solutions, including large national enterprises. There remained a need for creating new methods of achieving progress on issues related to youth, including the fulfilment of previous commitments.

ILEANA NUÑEZ (Cuba) said that the World Programme of Action for Youth represented an important step in the promotion of well-being for younger generations, but much remained to be done. Referring to her country's achievements regarding youth, she noted that the literacy rate of children was 99.96 per cent, access to all levels of education was free and universal, and full employment had been reached. However, some people wanted the country to go back in time, she said, referring to the economic blockade imposed on Cuba by the United States. Future generations needed a world free of hunger and poverty, without oppression and discrimination or genocidal blockades.

BEN WHITEHOUSE, youth representative for Australia, said that he was speaking for two groups of Australian young people: those living in a far-flung Aboriginal community surrounded by dilapidated houses and rubbish, and who had never seen the inside of a school; and those living in a large urban area, surrounded by multi-million dollar buildings and the latest computer technology. Despite their vast disparities, both segments of Australia's youth community believed that the biggest issues facing the world today were the crisis in Iraq and deepening poverty in many countries.

Turning to the state of Australian youth, he said that his country's multi-ethnic, multi-coloured society was bound by a feeling of community. The drive to be a part of the "national community" was reflected in the desires of Australia's youth as they strove to find their own place -- whether in rural towns or large cities -- to make their voices heard and take advantage of opportunities for advancement. At the same time, his travels around the country had revealed young people in difficult circumstances, including unrelenting violence and skyrocketing unemployment in some areas, and poor educational opportunities and abject poverty in others.

But nevertheless, he found that if given a choice, his fellow youth would stay in their communities, and persevere with their families and friends. So he had learned that it was, first and foremost, important for Governments to enable youth to remain in their communities and to create opportunities that would nurture and support them and ensure that they reached their full potential. Listening to young people and providing services that catered to their needs and security was of central importance to communities of all sizes, everywhere in the world. He added that youth representatives had the unique potential to bring the voices from the ground-level to the highest level decision-making body in the world. Therefore, there was nothing more vital to the prosperity and future of the United Nations than a new generation of people believing that the Organization was listening to them and acting on their behalf.

ALI HACHANI (Tunisia) said youth of today faced more complex problems than previous generations and that it was more important than ever to provide them with decent jobs. Unemployment and underemployment of youth were not just social problems but also had political and security dimensions. Globalization called for new solutions to the needs of young people. States needed the assurance that the international community would help them in development. Youth employment policies were not confined to interventions in the labour market but also included political, social, educational and fiscal policies.

He said significant investments had been made in Tunisia to modernize and re-evaluate teaching programmes to pass on the skills needed to integrate in the labour market. A national employment fund had been created to integrate youth who had difficulty finding jobs. There were

also sources of revenue for the underprivileged and policies to establish family economic projects. Tunisia remained committed to working at the international and nation levels to meet the needs of youth.

ERIK THUIS WEDERSHOVEN, youth representative from the Netherlands, began his address on the problem of youth unemployment by recalling the story of two boys from Guinea who had died six years ago in an airplane's landing gear while trying to reach Europe to escape danger and find a brighter future. He said that ensuring young people's rights was a matter of human dignity and world security, including the right to decent and productive work. Governments did not need to sign new agreements or declare new intentions but only to act, cooperating with micro-financing institutions, entrepreneurs, civil society and young people themselves. Research by the ILO had shown young entrepreneurs to have a high success rate and a good track record in paying off micro-credit loans. Youth Employment Spark, for example, was a youth-led network for young entrepreneurs that let them inspire and learn from each other.

He said Governments should support such global initiatives and networks. They should also promote initiatives to increase universal access to financial services for youth. In addition, they should translate United Nations resolutions, such as the World Programme of Action for Youth, into national plans; and then implement them.

ISHRAT J. AHMED (Bangladesh) said her country was fully committed to the World Programme of Action for Youth, and remained particularly focused on the unemployed segment of its young population. Special emphasis had also been placed in promoting the active participation of girls and young women.

Saying that Bangladesh had adopted a national youth policy in 2003, she noted that numerous positive steps had been taken to mainstream the country's young population. The country had improvised a set of skill development programmes that included computer and information technology, agriculture and secretarial sciences. Self-employment programmes including motivation training, group formation and the development of a marketing network were also developed through that policy. The Government has also developed an initiative called "Family-Based Employment Programme", providing micro-credit to youth. Through that initiative, some 65,511 young people had been given loans from the "Credit Fund".

ANTTON RÖNNHOLM, youth delegate from Finland, said 10 years later most Member States had still not provided an opportunity for the voices of youth to be heard in the Assembly. In spite of the fact that the Assembly had adopted numerous resolutions calling for the inclusion of youth representatives in delegations, true representation would only be achieved when national youth councils could conduct the selection of youth representatives for the delegations.

While the World Programme of Action for Youth had provided a good basis for any country to develop a national youth policy, he believed the document needed to be strengthened and youth organizations needed to be involved in the implementation and monitoring of the Programme. A monitoring system with indicators similar to that of the Human Development Index, suitable to youth issues, could be used to analyze data to get a better overall picture of the situation of young people. In addition, a United Nations task force should be established to coordinate and implement the Programme, to make reporting official and efficient.

U WIN MRA, Director-General of the International Organizations and Economic Department, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Myanmar, said that young people now made up about 18 per cent of the world's population. The 1995 World Programme of Action for Youth focused on 10 priority areas -- from hunger and poverty to juvenile delinquency and discrimination against women and girls. Although there had been many economic and social changes over the past decade, Myanmar strongly believed those priorities remained relevant today. Rather than diluting them by expanding the priority areas, he urged the Assembly to recommit to existing goals and to streamline initiatives to address modern day challenges into agreed youth development targets.

What was clear, he said, was that poverty was at the heart of most of the problems facing today's youth. Indeed the goals of improving health care, providing quality education and decent housing could not be achieved if poverty continued to deepen around the world. Education was the primary solution to poverty alleviation. And while the Secretary-General's report had highlighted a worldwide increase in secondary school enrolment over the past decade, the gap between male and female literacy rates in Asia and Africa appeared to be widening. That phenomenon not only called for additional international efforts to better educate girls and women, but also required concerted efforts to eradicate the "digital divide" to improve access to new and emerging educational concepts, such as distance and e-learning.

VICTORIA UWONKUNDA, youth representative of Norway, said that as a refugee from Rwanda, she understood first-hand the great tragedy afflicting children in war-torn places like Northern Uganda. Speaking about her country's support for the World Youth Report's demand to integrate children who were victims of armed conflict, she reiterated the special needs of children and youth who were forced to seek asylum in safer countries. Unaccompanied minors who arrived in countries as refugees were often treated like adults, but they really needed special treatment, adapted information, and the appointment of a guardian to be responsible for providing help and assistance.

Calling young refugees not just a burden, but a resource, she said that refugee children had an abundance of knowledge and resources, and they must be integrated into their new societies in order to avoid creating a new lower class within their countries. She urged States that had not done so to ratify and comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to incorporate it into national law.

ALP KUTLUALP, youth delegate of Turkey, said that while some progress had been made in priority areas defined by the World Programme of Action, serious challenges still remained. Young people needed to be involved in both the Programme's decision-making and implementation processes. Cooperation between Governments and civil society organizations was also crucial for success.

He said Turkey had made important progress in many areas, including education, health, environment, girls and young women. The success in raising awareness of gender issues and the sustained efforts for increasing the schooling rate of girls deserved particular attention. Activities of civil society on youth issues in Turkey were also commendable, especially the establishment of the Local Agenda 21 Youth Parliament in 2004, which brought together 297 youth delegates from all over the country.

He also expressed his wish for an increase in the number of occasions when youth delegates would be able to participate in the work of the United Nations. Such opportunities not only enriched the debate and policy dialogue, but also strengthened existing channels of communication and cooperation between Governments and young people.

OHENE BLAKE, youth delegate of Jamaica, said that little could be said of progress made in the 10 priority areas outlined in the 1995 World Programme of Action for Youth. The United Nations needed to develop an index and establish a committee with a special portfolio to conduct continuous evaluation. The Programme had failed to adequately address core issues related to inter-generational relations. Policymakers failed to adequately address youth participation and to support sustained youth involvement, in order to incorporate the ideas and perspectives of youth in society.

In order to institutionalize the participation and involvement of youth, he said that the Organization should establish permanent youth representatives to the United Nations as part of a youth ambassador programme. If the participation of youth was to amount to more than tokenism, officials at the highest level of the United Nations must engage the youth delegates in meaningful dialogue. There should also be a shadow "Youth Secretary-General" appointed to work on a full-time basis with the Secretary-General. That person would be charged with ensuring that the priorities of the Programme were met.

INES VEGAS, National Commission for Youth of Peru, said that her Government had recognized that while the country's youth population had made real strides in recent years, much remained to be done to ensure that all young people were able to overcome poverty and to participate fully in Peruvian society. Therefore, the Government had expressed its clear commitment to involve young people as stakeholders in the country's development.

Peru's National Youth Council worked with ministries to ensure that youth-centred issues and policies were integrated at all levels, she said. The Government had also worked hard to ensure that youth-focused civil society groups and civic actors were actively involved in decision-making and policy formulation. It was important to take youth seriously, she said, adding that it was necessary to ensure not only that they could participate in the work of running the country but to also ensure that they believed that their voices were being heard and making a difference.

BAKHTIYAR HAJIYEV, youth representative from Azerbaijan, said that poverty represented a serious threat to the security and well-being of young people, depriving them of education and employment opportunities, and making them vulnerable to human trafficking and

exploitation. Young people wanted to make their own contribution, rather than just be a group for which employment must be found, he said. They wanted to partake in the process and be partners for development. According to statistical data, only a small percentage of youth across the globe were able to launch their own businesses or engage in entrepreneurial activity. If Governments were to promote youth entrepreneurship, and national youth-led business funds, youth unemployment would decline.

He said another challenge facing the youth of Azerbaijan was the country's continued armed conflict with Armenia, which limited prospects for development. As a result of the conflict, generations of young Azerbaijani women and men grew up in camps for refugees and internally displaced persons. Youth on both sides could contribute tremendously to resolving the conflict, which was vital to the security and development of the region.

CARLA MOURO, youth representative of Portugal, described the projects her Government had undertaken through the National Youth Council to implement the Programme of Action. She said the full participation of young people in decision-making was a key priority, and all national Governments should include youth representatives in their delegations to international events, including to meetings of the General Assembly and the Commission on Social Development. Youth delegates could take knowledge back home and pass it on to other young people, which would motivate young people to engage and be active in shaping a common future for humanity. Likewise, youth could contribute input to institutional discussions.

CONNIE TARACENA (Guatemala) said an evaluation of the situation of youth in the world was tantamount to an evaluation of the future of the world. Two years ago, Guatemala established the National Policy for Youth to guide the State in improving the quality of life of youth and advancing their integral development.

She cited four principles on which the National Policy was based: human rights, multiculturalism, sustainability, and inter-generational cooperation. It also incorporated citizen participation, community security and justice, and an emphasis on employment. She suggested the creation of a United Nations youth fund, which would provide resources for young people from developing nations to partake in United Nations gatherings of direct interest to them.

PRAVIT CHAIMONGKOL (Thailand) said that while it was evident that progress on youth development had been made on many fronts, several challenges still remained. While education was a key to alleviating poverty, poverty was a major obstacle to education. A young person whose basic needs were not met could not reasonably be expected to attend school. Therefore, poverty must be tackled alongside the improvement of access to all levels of education.

Youth employment could also serve as a tool for development, he said, noting that young people in many parts of the world still faced unemployment and underemployment. That hindered the development process and increased the vulnerability of young people to other kinds of social and political problems, including drugs, human smuggling, and recruitment into armed conflicts. For that reason, young people needed to gain skills that matched the available jobs. Governments must create decent employment opportunities for them.

He said that in 2002, Thailand adopted the National Policy and 10-year Plan of Action on Children and Youth, which aimed to promote the role of the family in building the capacity of young people and to empower them with the skills and knowledge to make informed choices on matters relating to their own lives and to society as a whole.

NEEMA MEENA, youth representative of the United Republic of Tanzania, said that youth in her country comprised nearly a third of the population and 65 per cent of the work force. Therefore, they had to be included in decision-making. Further, their issues had to be made an integral part of development policies. Since most of the country's youth lived in rural areas, it was necessary to address inequities between opportunities in urban and rural areas. Also, the informal sector in urban areas had to be promoted through the fostering of entrepreneurship, infrastructure development and infusion of capital.

In order for youth to be able to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by globalization, she said the quality of their education had to be improved and efforts needed to be made to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries. In working towards the betterment of the lives of youth, young people had a responsibility to be good citizens and to contribute to the welfare of their communities. Leaders both nationally and internationally needed to have the political will and commitment to create environments conducive to youth empowerment. Youth ought to be viewed as assets, not as problems.

SHINICHI KITAOKA (Japan) said that although much progress had been made in implementing the 1995 World Programme of Action, the current generation of young people faced even more complex challenges than could ever have been envisioned a decade ago. As Japanese society changed, the country's demographic structures had been affected, creating more single-person families or families with one child, mainly due to decreased birth rates and an ageing population. In order to promote the sound development of the young people who would lead Japan and contribute to global society in the twenty-first century, he said it had been important to take "drastic action" when the national youth development policy had been formulated.

Turning to Japan's efforts to implement the World Programme of Action, he said his Government had been adopting measures for youth development aimed at boosting independence, responsibility, tolerance, solidarity and the promotion of human rights. Japan was also firmly engaged in international cooperation and supported youth in developing countries by providing development assistance, as well as by engaging in international exchange and volunteer activities. By example, he said Japan had vigorously provided assistance in the field of education by building educational institutions, accepting teachers for training, as well as providing educational materials and classroom equipment.

IDREES MOHAMMED ALI (Sudan) said today's session with the participation of youth was evidence of the United Nations carrying out its commitment to reforming and revitalizing itself. The session was a pledge to youth that their concerns would continue to be central to the Organization and to Member States. Major achievements had been made in his country over the past 10 years through the implementation of the Programme, including in the area of higher education. Technological illiteracy had been addressed by carrying out programmes in youth centres, and youth had participated in carrying out health-related activities, such as the campaign against malaria. Sudanese youth were ready to join with others to build a better future.

M.S. GILL (India) said his country was an ancient civilization but a young society, with nearly 56 per cent of the population below 24 years of age. Young people played a major role in national reconstruction and social change. The national Youth Policy centred on empowerment of youth in various spheres of national life. Youth development programmes focused on citizenship, commitment to community, social justice and humanism, since the attitude of youth played a determining role in shaping the future.

A special focus should be placed on youth employment in the work of the United Nations, he continued. The Secretary-General's efforts to promote the Youth Employment Network were welcome and development of the Network over the next months was of interest. While challenges for all-around development of youth were daunting, they could be surmounted with effective national and international efforts. Youth-related issues should be seen in the context of social and economic development. The potential for youth to be a major force in social change should be given greater attention. Youth should participate more in political systems to ensure their concerns were properly factored into national policies and programmes.

Mr. PUJA (Indonesia) said that while progress had been made towards the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth, success had been uneven in terms of areas of concern and from country to country. Particular attention had to be focused on the five new areas that had been identified as critical concerns for youth. Indonesia had set a number of objectives related to reducing unemployment, boosting economic growth and cutting the poverty rate through a "triple-track" strategy. That strategy involved boosting economic growth by means of strong exports and increased investments; stimulating the performance of employment-generating sectors; and promoting the development of the rural economy.

In striving to achieve employment goals for youth, he said Indonesia was paying particular attention to gender equality, the creation of quality jobs, the provision of quality education and the fostering of entrepreneurship. Other initiatives underway explored employment opportunities in emerging sectors, such as tourism, mass media, health and education, environmental conservation, the service sector and information and communication technologies. Attention was also being paid to improving the agro-industries sector in order to strengthen the urban-rural linkages necessary for job creation, poverty reduction and combating hunger.

JULIA GARANT, youth representative of Canada, said that the world's young people were not only the future, but also the present. The policies and programmes initiated for youth today were a means to help with the demographic challenges of tomorrow. With an ageing workforce, the participation of all Canadians must be maximized.

Many Canadian immigrant youth faced linguistic and cultural challenges, she said. Some 50 per cent of Canadian youth were not enrolled in post-secondary education and faced problems entering the workforce where most jobs were now highly skilled. The Government was actively involved in youth issues through consultations, including the website youth.gc.ca -- a Canadian website designed specifically for youth. Such initiatives supported Canada's goal of having young Canadians play a vital role in policy making through on-line and in-person consultations.

She added that the Canadian International Development Agency had supported an array of initiatives for youth worldwide in four main areas: improving the quality of education, removing barriers to resolve gender inequality in education, better education for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, and providing education for boys and girls in conflict.

ALEXANDER LIM ([Singapore](#)) said that last year, his Prime Minister had called on all Singaporeans to "step forward to make a difference" by better engaging the country's youth. Singapore's Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports had subsequently adopted a strategy aimed at assisting youth to develop a stake in society, to ensure they had a say in national affairs, and to provide them with the support they needed to develop and participate meaningfully in society, through facilitation, mentorship and other assistance mechanisms.

He said it was necessary for youth to understand and appreciate world realities beyond their home communities. To that end, the Government had initiated regional and international youth exchanges to connect Singapore's youth to the wider world. Through such strategic initiatives, youth leaders of participating organizations and groups had had the opportunity to share best practices with their overseas peers. Youth were a key resource for society, he said, adding "If we leverage on the potential of our youth, communities will develop and grow stronger".

Mr. ABEL, youth representative for [Brazil](#), said that it had been 10 years since the World Programme of Action for Youth was enacted, and since then, Brazil had been working to improve conditions for its youth. Brazil had 34 million young people -- 28 per cent of its population. In Brazil, it was young people who suffered most from the lack of resources and opportunities. The Programme was a focal point for improving the conditions of the country's young people.

He said that, in February, the Government established a national youth secretariat and a special forum for youth. In 2005, more than 200,000 young people would benefit from those programmes. Thanks to a new national policy, youth were also guaranteed universal access to anti-retroviral drugs. Thus, the rate of infection for young people had remained very low, and access to education about HIV/AIDS and free condoms were available in all schools. The Government was also making efforts to include young people in the labour market in order to end social inequality.

DINESH BHATTARAI ([Nepal](#)) said that the World Summit Outcome Document included commitments to the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people. It also provided a road map to address the issues of social protection and welfare of children, youth, the elderly and disabled.

Saying that several development forums had brought youth to the forefront of international development issues, he noted that there was a need to give youth, particularly from marginalized and disadvantaged communities, a say and a share in the development process. It was also imperative that the severity of inequalities be addressed and programmes be put in place for employment opportunities. Youth empowerment was necessary to combat vulnerability to fundamentalism, radicalism, and terrorism. In an increasingly interconnected world, creating a global partnership with young people must happen for any youth programme to succeed. Development programmes should, therefore, focus on growth, poverty reduction, and the creation of decent work for all.

LE LUONG MINH ([Viet Nam](#)) said that, due to financial constraints, Viet Nam had not been able to send a youth delegation to attend the meeting, but its commitment to youth development remained strong. In the country's National Youth Development Strategy to 2010, unemployment was identified as the biggest difficulty currently facing young people. Many efforts had been undertaken to address the problem. Since the Enterprise Law was adopted in 2000, nearly 60,000 private companies had been created, providing between 1.3 and 1.5 million jobs. Microcredit had been made more accessible to young people, especially those living in poorer areas, to start their own businesses. Viet Nam had set a target of creating 1.5 million new jobs a year, for a total of 8 million by 2010.

The achievement of universal primary education was on track to be accomplished by 2015, he said. Efforts were also underway to increase enrolment in secondary school and eliminate illiteracy for all women under the age of 40 by 2010. Special attention had also been given to rural and remote areas and to minority groups. Cooperation between countries and among young people from different countries at the regional and international levels was essential in order to share experiences, training and technical and financial assistance.

SIDSE KAMILLE BJERREGAARD DAMSGAARD-LARSEN, of the Danish Youth Council, said it was a privilege to address the Assembly because young people, and particularly young women, had a hard time getting their voices heard. Too often young people were not included in decisions that impacted their lives. Young people were too often associated with problems instead of solutions. While it was true that youth were over-represented in negative statistics, they needed to be involved in fighting problems like AIDS and public security. On the issue of AIDS, it was pivotal to encourage young people to abstain, be faithful or use condoms. As for anti-terror efforts, young people must be shielded from totalitarian ideas and provided with positive democratic experiences and cultural tolerance.

She said much more could be done nationally and internationally to involve young people in solving major world problems. For one thing, it was necessary to quantify the problems facing them. The World Bank had set an example by dedicating its World Development Report 2007 to young people and consulting with young people about which problems to include. Also, obligations already agreed upon needed to be met. Too many Member States had not given the World Programme the attention it deserved. A comprehensive strategy for involving young people in achieving the Millennium Goals was lacking. Numerous agreements had been signed to address poverty, education and the rights of children. Extraordinary efforts were now needed to make those visions a reality.

PRASAD KARIYAWASAM (Sri Lanka) said many obstacles stood in the way of achieving decent standards of social development. The increasing strain on precious resources was a major constraint. A contemporary phenomenon affecting youth in developing countries was large-scale migration to look for work and better living conditions. It was heartening that the recent Summit outcome document had referred to the issue of migration, and that the Assembly would discuss the phenomenon in relation to development. Since migration primarily affected youth and their aspirations, the United Nations must make all efforts to mainstream the issue in all its work system-wide.

Describing the steps taken to implement the Programme of Action, he said his country had good indicators and had always given priority to programmes for youth. Their views and concerns were formulated into policies and strategies, especially relating to poverty, education and employment. Action plans focused on enhancing the quality of education and providing equal opportunities for employment. Youth participation in decision-making at all levels was encouraged as a matter of national policy.

MATEJ PERETIN, Youth Representative of Croatia, said a National Youth Council had been created in his country in 2001 as part of its implementation of the Programme. It operated as a national civil society organization open to all between the ages of 15 and 29. A Social Partnership Agreement had been signed with the Government, and the Council was approved as a member of a working group to elaborate a National Programme of Action. The Council had represented Croatian youth in international events, including the Fourth United Nations World Youth Forum in Dakar, the International Labour Organization Global Employment Forum and the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva. In 2005, the Council was awarded the World Youth Award by the World Assembly of Youth as one of the three most effective national youth councils in the world. The Council's Secretary-General served as the Assembly's Vice-president.

He said the Council relied heavily on information and communication technology. A demonstration had been set up in the Secretariat lobby to provide further information. Of particular interest was the World Youth Bank initiative that had begun in 2002 and had now led to the World Youth Bank Network. A side event would be held tomorrow that focused on a strategy to address the high levels of youth unemployment.

MELLE DOUNIAZED HENNOUDA (Algeria) said the Programme of Action, adopted 10 years ago, provided an outline of the important potential of youth, as well as the need to involve them in decision-making processes. However, the continuing unemployment among young people, drug use and the scourge of HIV/AIDS were major concerns that must be dealt with more effectively.

She said the problem with globalization was that it gave rise to ambivalence and created the “marginalization phenomenon”. It was important to determine how to ensure mutual understanding and a strengthening of links among youth and to avoid marginalization through globalization. The answer was to try to better understand globalization and better control it, in order to increase ideas for more employment opportunities. She emphasized the need to directly involve youth in coming up with solutions to end drug use and the HIV/AIDS problem among youth.

ANDRINA MCHIELA, Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare, and Community Services of Malawi, drew attention to the fact that the World Youth Report 2005 stated that sub-Saharan Africa was home to large numbers of young people living in extreme poverty. It had been proven that when health, education and employment needs of youth were earnestly addressed, the result was poverty reduction, economic growth and human development. The international community had the moral obligation to provide youth-related programmes with adequate resources.

She said the HIV/AIDS pandemic seriously threatened the lives of young people. Malawi’s National AIDS Commission continued to focus on treating those affected by the disease. A National Plan of Action for orphans and other vulnerable children was launched to cope with the unprecedented number of orphans and to help families and communities provide adequate care for those affected. Malawi had also adopted universal free primary education, which had caused primary school enrolment to soar. Access to secondary and higher education remained a challenge, however, especially for orphans and poor young people. Malawi continued to create youth centres in urban and rural areas, and was committed to keeping the youth agenda a high priority.

CARLOS ENRIQUE GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ (El Salvador) said that youth violence was a subject that required attention. The negative impact of developments such as natural disasters and high oil prices were of great concern. Many of his country’s resources were being diverted to deal with immediate crises, and away from longer-term development objectives.

El Salvador had proposed an institutional response for youth problems, including a Secretariat for Youth, he said. Among the areas that required particular attention in promoting the interests of youth was developing their independence and creativity. El Salvador saw its youth not only as a great resource for the future but also for the present. Cooperation was the cornerstone for constructing societies that most benefited youth and people of all ages.

LAILA TAJ EL DINE (Venezuela) said that, after 10 years, the fact that young people continued to suffer from hunger, poverty, unemployment and lack of education was a result of the imperial economic system of the United States and its allies, whose only objective was to increase exploitation and dominate the markets and peoples of the world. By comparison, Venezuela had adopted measures intended to promote social and economic development from a humanistic perspective. In that system, young people were a central priority of the Government. Literacy programmes were close to ensuring 100 per cent literacy for a portion of the country. Hundreds of thousands of young people, who had not been able to afford secondary school, had been given the opportunity to attend for free, even receiving stipends. Young people were also included in the political sphere.

The entire world had been affected by the imperialist and neoliberal policies of institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Group of Eight and the World Bank, she said. The gap between rich and poor continued to grow as a result of imperialist policies that produced catastrophic effects for millions of people around the world, youth among them. Now the principal task of young people was to fight against hunger and for peace, social justice, self-determination, and a world free of nuclear arms. It was also necessary to ensure that the human race survived the destruction that threatened the environment.

JUAN MANUEL GÓMEZ-ROBLEDO (Mexico) said a national policy and an Institute on Youth Affairs insured that the concerns of youth were incorporated into all of his Government’s policies and programmes. The strategy for youth centred on three goals: improving the quality of life for young people; creating opportunities for them; and fostering equitable conditions for marginalized young people. The result of all the actions taken on behalf of youth had led to the creation of opportunities for young people to be involved in matters affecting them. The involvement of youth had led them to be better citizens and to be more integrated socially. The Government consulted the Institute when developing programmes, and in

implementing the World Programme on Youth. The new priorities included in the resolution to be adopted today were welcome.

ANRI SAMKHARADZE, youth representative of Georgia and President of The Anti-Drug Society of that country, gave an overview of the damage that illegal drugs did to youth, economies, and the environment. Calling the twenty-first century the century of integrated thinking, he said that the problem should be dealt with from the political, economic, psychological and social angles.

He also described his reaction to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, which he said was an attack on the idea of democracy. In the face of such violence, he urged the youth of the world to unite against drug addiction, which caused individuals to be as unstable as terrorists. All such personal instability might result in catastrophe for democratic development and humanity in general.

Ms. AMATI (San Marino) said that globalization had changed the world in the past few decades, and that her generation was particularly fortunate because it had the opportunity to share its cultures with each other. Education was the basis for a more advanced and developed society. Therefore, one of the most important ways to promote the well-being of youth was to provide them with “good and sound” education. Education had to be the first of priorities. Students ought to be provided with financial aid, and education ought to entail the study of individuals’ own cultures. In San Marino, families were extremely important and were a core facet of the culture. Youth had a great deal to learn from their elders and that ought to be an important ingredient in their education.

Mr. RUSTOM (Syria) said his country had a very young population, with youth accounting for some 25 per cent of the population. The student population had also grown rapidly, which also meant a drain on Government resources. The Government had always focused on education, making it free and compulsory. The curricula had been adapted to include gender equality and education in information technology. Virtual learning had also been developed. A new health programme had been instituted in 2002 in conjunction with the World Health Organization to provide health education aimed at youth. Efforts had also been made to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Drug addiction was not a serious problem, he added, in part because of religious beliefs.

He said Syria was involved in the Youth Employment Network, which worked to rehabilitate and train youth and place them in the labour force. There had also been other efforts to provide access to financial support for the development of businesses by youth.

GILBERT KODJO ATSOU (Togo) said that despite the good will of the Government and youth organizations, the financial situation in his country hampered the implementation of the Programme of Action. Aid from development partners had dried up and the structural measures recommended by the Bretton Woods institutions had created an unfavourable investment climate. Even so, the current President had placed the concerns of youth at the centre of the country’s agenda and a State secretariat had been established to address youths’ concerns. Improving the quality of life for youth was the overall aim.

He said the Government’s implementation of its programme for youth focused on areas such as education and employment. Young people would become the most important stakeholders in rebuilding the economy. In the months since the secretariat had been established, a wave of new teachers had already been deployed and another wave was being trained.

THOMAS NYARKO AMPEM, youth representative of Ghana, said his country had been taking bold steps towards developing its youth. It was actively considering a national youth policy based on the 10 priority areas identified in the World Programme of Action. Youth organizations had also developed a national youth charter to express their priorities. The Government had introduced free primary education and established a National Youth Fund to help young people establish small businesses.

He said Ghanaian youth, like many others in Africa, benefited least from globalization. For that reason, issues regarding unfair trade and competition must be seriously addressed. Well-coordinated and intensive exchange programmes between youth organizations of the North and South were also needed. While youth-led development was important, the rich experiences of the older generation should not be forgotten. It was important to ensure that the lion’s share of resources aimed at solving youth unemployment was directed to regions with a larger percentage of young people, such as Asia and Africa.

Ms. AL HAJRI (Qatar) said her Government had worked very hard to implement the World Programme of Action, and had undertaken efforts to improve the overall situation of youth, as exemplified by the work of its Department for Youth. Qatar was focusing its efforts now on raising the level and quality of education, particularly at the university level. It had also established several scientific research centres, and integrated disabled persons and youths with disabilities into teaching programmes.

She went on to say that the Government had made it a priority to create job opportunities for young people and had also encouraged the private sector to recruit youth. Qatar also partnered with organizations such as the United Nations and various non-governmental organizations to ensure that the unique issues concerning youth were addressed at home and throughout the region. Finally, she urged the United Nations to help countries build their capacities to implement the World Programme of Action.

Mr. ALGHANNAM (Saudi Arabia) said his country had set up a new centre for information exchange on social issues in which the concerns of the country's youth were a priority. Among other activities, workshops had been conducted to promote dialogue among young people, to identify issues that were important to them, and to ensure that their views reached the decision makers. Those who had taken part in those activities had shown that the effort had borne fruit in that they promoted the welfare of the youth.

Mr. TREMINIO RIVERA (Nicaragua) said his country had made sure that youth policies were not left in isolation, but were worked into national policy. There were many challenges facing Nicaragua's youth, including unemployment and HIV/AIDS. The new strategy to address those problems called for the Health Department to become involved in education. Also, the first youth survey would be undertaken to guide the development of the policy. Sex education seminars would help to reduce the birth rate and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Funding for programmes would be found by reducing external debt in cooperation with development partners.

NADINE LOUIS, Youth Representative of Haiti, expressed the hope that Member States would hear her country's claim that its youth were deprived of all economic and social opportunities, that there was no infrastructure for public health care and public hygiene, and that it was difficult to ensure development. Despite the Government's efforts, Haiti had not been able to set up a successful youth development programme. Ten years after the launch of the World Programme, the situation of young Haitians had not improved and the number of unemployed youth had risen. Unemployment would not allow a solution to Haiti's political crisis and the needs of young people would not be addressed through the Youth Policy.

Focusing on labour market issues related to unemployment, she said the market had no place for youth, whether they were from rural or urban centres. That could be explained by the boat phenomenon by which youths tried to reach urban centres for a better life. In that category of potential migrants, many become involved in delinquency in Port-au-Prince, leading to a worsening of the country's security situation. Youth were now trying to understand what would be the best type of programme for their circumstances. The United Nations should help to create a group of representatives who would help youth discuss their problems across borders.

Mr. MATLOSA (Lesotho) said his country had one of the highest incidences of HIV/AIDS in the world, which made it almost impossible to achieve development goals. Young people had to wage war against the epidemic, and the World Programme for Youth had to create a battle plan against HIV/AIDS. The United Nations was the strongest entity to fight the epidemic and it had to devote more resources towards the battle. HIV/AIDS was the greatest impediment to the achievement of goals for youth.

The pandemic combined with deep poverty and food insecurity created a crisis that affected nearly all youths in Lesotho, he said. It undermined society, families and all social structures. Youth were in a crisis, but the social and political climate in many developing countries provided a real opportunity to address problems such as HIV/AIDS, poverty and hunger. But for many in those countries, achieving the goals of the World Programme of Action for Youth was just a dream requiring many more resources.

CELESTINO MIGLIORE, Observer of the Holy See, said that for young people to reach their aspirations of greatness, they must be mindful of others, especially the needy. In order to do that, they needed the leadership and resources of Governments, the cooperation of non-governmental organizations and the good will and hard work of all people. The ability to accomplish the specific goals of the 10 youth priorities boiled down to commitment.

He made clear that his understanding of sexual and reproductive health did not include a consideration of access to abortion. He also affirmed that the Holy See was fully committed to the education of youth -- with 51 million enrolled in Catholic schools worldwide -- and the ethical socialization of youth by means of thousands of youth groups. He said there were also programmes that addressed youth at risk, health, drugs, delinquency and discrimination.

SYED SHAHID HUSAIN, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), said that while advances had been made in reaching the goals of the Programme of Action, the expectations raised 10 years ago had not been met. Amid such stark and startling realities, the case for renewing the commitment to the Programme's goals could not be clearer. The 10 priority issues of 1995 should be augmented with the five identified in the World Youth Report.

He said the thirty-second Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Yemen this summer welcomed the establishment of the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation. The Forum would become a credible source of information and advice on national youth policy issues, coordinate the activities of national youth organizations in OIC nations and Muslim communities elsewhere, and help train youth leaders for advocacy and organizational roles.

The Ministerial Conference, he continued, also called for convening the first Conference on the Welfare and Protection of the Muslim Child, to be held next month in Morocco. The Ministers also strongly affirmed their commitment to eradicating polio. Those commitments were a reflection of the OIC's emphasis on the promotion of Islamic family values and the different needs of men, women, children and youth. The family, the basic social unit of society, should provide the basis for a morally straight, economically stable, healthy and viable society.

Action on Draft Resolution

The Assembly adopted the draft resolution on policies and programmes involving youth (A/60/L.2) without a vote.

In explanation of position after action, Ms. GARCÍA-MATOS (Venezuela) said she disassociated herself from any reference to the Summit Outcome Document in the draft, since the document was an illegitimate one.

Right of Reply

Ms. SHESTACK (United States) said the trade embargo against Cuba was a bilateral issue that should not intervene in the issues before the General Assembly. Cuba was just trying to blame others for the failings of its economic system. The Cuban Government had refused to undertake any economic reform, and so the country had become economically desperate. Cuba was not a victim but a tyrant, criticizing any country that disagreed with it. The United States could not support an economic opening with a country with such an abysmal record on economic and social issues.

Ms. THOMAS (Cuba) said her country was not trying to blame the United States. The United States did not need Cuba to blame it; it served to blame itself when it refused to comply with resolutions of the Assembly for years. Before the revolution, there was terrible unemployment and lack of education in Cuba and that was the Cuba of United States domination. The United States was trying to say that Cuba was using the embargo as an excuse. Only a "racist, fascist, arrogant and disturbed mentality" such as that of the current Bush administration could maintain the embargo. It was a war unleashed against Cuba for 40 years, and had been maintained without any recognition of international law.

Never had a country suffered for so long the danger of having such a powerful neighbour, a neighbour that had tried to dominate Cuba for over a century, she said. Everyone knew that Cuba had been a thorn in the side of the sole super-Power, the United States. The thorn had become stronger and more robust over the years. It was clear that the United States was just trying to stigmatize Cuba because it continued to try to defend its independence and trace its own path toward the future. The United States had no moral standing to say anything about Cuba or any other country in the world.

In closing, Assembly President JAN ELIASSON (Sweden) noted the presence of the Togolese delegation, which had participated in the negotiation of the resolution just adopted. He

hoped delegations had established good contacts with which to translate their experiences over the past two days at the United Nations into action on the ground.

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