

STATEMENT MADE BY MISS MARIA DE
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OF THE XXVITH GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON
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Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

Madam Chairman,

Allow me to start by congratulating you, on behalf of the people and of the Government of Portugal, for your election to guide the work of the III Committee. Personally, the least I can say about your chairmanship is that, through your firmness and sense of direction, you were able to convince me, a newcomer in this Committee, to make my intervention today, while I had planned to make it as late as possible!

My congratulations go also to the other members of the Bureau.

The report introduced so clearly by Mr. Jansson to the III Committee is an extremely valuable SURVEY of the world social situation. I underline the word survey, because this word conveys to me at once the scope and the limitations of the report.

The scope is, in fact, as big as the world itself. Nobody who is in the least degree acquainted with research in the public or private sector will deny the impressive amount of work, of compilation and correlation of data, of creative thinking, that has made ^{of} this report a rather fascinating "book" to read.

There is scope also in the attempt to encompass the global situation of each region, including information, comments and even elements of prospective on some relevant specific factors in the social development of the region concerned.

I am thinking, for example, about the chapters on "Youth and the community", "cultural aspects of social change" and "problems of participation, conflict and protest"

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in the addendum concerning Western Europe; I am thinking also about the typology criterium applied to the Latin American countries, about the attempt to evaluate development planning in the African continent, etc...

There is scope also in Part II of the report, both in the vast amount of sources referred to and in the attempt to give autonomy to sectors which seldom have adequate treatment, namely the rehabilitation of the disabled, regional and community development, urban and physical planning, etc..

But this ambitious and, to a great extent, rather successful report, has its limitations of which, I am sure, its authors are the first to be aware of. If you allow me, Madam Chairman, I am going to describe the most obvious limitations and will try to come, at the end, hopefully to some constructive suggestions.

The first limitation comes from the very attempt to make^a comprehensive and, therefore, comparable report. This comes, partly, from the over-utilization of statistics. It is a dangerous tool, tending to make the world uni-dimensional. It seems to me that social sciences don't need to prove anymore their capacity for interpreting reality by the use of statistics.

Comparative figures are part of the seemingly unavoidable process of the escalade of production, of the escalade of consumption, of the escalade of social measures as new consumption-production goods.

Such an escalade creates in the public opinion the conviction that it is good, necessary and always identical. When, through the process of "social demand", such conviction

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is translated in political measures, it tends to accentuate isolation and over-individualism, to engender a mechanism of national self-deception, to widen the gap between nations.

This comment does not deny the need for a "quantitative" picture of the world; it rather asks for a quantitative picture in which, as it was stated in a meeting of experts on social policy and planning, "while much more statistical work and data collection are needed, emphasis should be given to the neglected areas, normally called "social", and to the conceptual problem of how to test and combine the indicators and obtain the knowledge of the coefficients of interrelations between them". (E/CH.5/445, pg.5)

Thus, my delegation supports the suggestion made by the distinguished delegate of Poland that the report should have a more qualitative approach which includes, and yet goes beyond, the quantitative one, giving interpretation and rationale to it.

The second limitation of the report consists, in the view of my delegation, in the sectorial approach to the global problem of social development. (This has been remarked among others, by the distinguished delegate of France). It is true that the introduction of the report stresses this very limitation, pointing out to aspects of social development which will need multi-sectorial or super-sectorial approach in the future. (pag. 19 Intr.) There is not yet a possibility for adequate analysis and thus for operational planning. However, the sectorial approach in this threshold of DD2 appears as misleading in so far as it raises before all nations uniform needs, deriving, moreover, from a particular concept of man and society. To give just one example, while commenting on "food production" (Intro. pg. 9) the report says that

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"that access to a more nutritious diet is to a large extent determined by earning capacity". Maybe this sentence is out of context and needs to be nuancée; nevertheless, it speaks of a concept of man's well-being as depending on his earning capacity. It seems that, though this view may be defended in a production-oriented society, it certainly cannot correspond to the basic convictions of the United Nations. On the contrary, the interdependence among men must give room to gratuitous actions, to creativity which nobody and nothing can pay.

It would seem a dangerous path to follow if the United Nations would set up the same kind of targets for the whole world in the different sectors. I presume that such is not the intention of the report, given the background of all the work done by the United Nations on the level of a unified development planning.

The third limitation my delegation notes in the voluminous report is a certain "foggy" concept of social development and of its realm. After the first euphoria of economists over strictly economic factors, we had the era of the humanists pleading for what they called more "human", more "social" areas. It is important to note in this regard one of the conclusions of the "meeting of experts on social policy and planning", namely that "the isolated use of individual indicators in their present and often misleading form should be discouraged, whether so-called "economic" indicators such as GNP or so-called "Social" indicators such as enrolment rates." (E/CN.5/445, pg.6)

In fact, the report under our consideration couldn't avoid such treatment of social development and is therefore "imperfect" and "misleading". My delegation does not ignore the difficulty met by the authors of the report in the "lack of methodological tools for integrated planning"

(Intr., pg. 17), but wished that lack would be emphasized alongside with the indicators given in the sectorial analysis of the report.

It may be argued that the comments I have just made are more theoretical than operational. They are, however, the background for the main points I would like to stress here, Madam Chairman.

If the world social situation is deteriorating, we are not going to help it by using this report as the instrument of appraisal and evaluation during DD2. It is, the heart of the matter that needs to be tackled. And it consists in a simple question: is development a quantifiable and therefore, uniform and comparable reality?

The unified approach for development planning cannot be looked for in terms of the juxtaposition of social and economic indicators and goals. Development, of which economic and social factors are integrative parts, is, to the understanding of my delegation, the process through which a given society faces its own historical evolution and draws from its cultural roots the impetus to give direction and purpose to it.

Each cultural group, bound by history and by common aspirations, is the only one able to discover its own law of development. This is true as well of a nation as of regional or ethnical groups within a nation. The firm way in which the distinguished delegate of Brazil has challenged in his intervention the taken-for-granted question of the population growth is a clarifying example of the cultural differentiation needed for every process of development to happen. Such was the conviction expressed at the meeting of experts on social policy and planning: "Each

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country should conduct research to determine which are the best available indicators of the degree of success in attaining true social goals. It is much more important for each country to have useful indicators for its own planning purposes than to have standardized indicators to permit international comparisons" (E/CN.5/455, pg. 25) Such strong opinion is confirmed by the work of some anthropologists and sociologists in recent years, with their emphasis on studies-in-depth at the micro-level.

My question is, then: are the United Nations, as the most representative body of the world, willing to loosen their grip on the over-centralization of research, are they willing to avoid the illusion of an over-all picture that comes from a world-wide model?

Madam Chairman the resolution concerning the International Development Strategy stresses the need to mobilize public opinion. However, to pretend that public opinion can be mobilized, at the attitudinal level, by a rather uniform concept of development is to disregard the fundamental law of nature, according to which it is only real what can be actualized.

Each group can get, from the inner core of its being, a focus for the process of development, something that is greater than the achievement of sectorial targets, a goal to be achieved by a community (large or small, gathered in the same space or scattered in different places) who has the same basic understanding of life and values.

Unless the United Nations stimulate the discovery of ways through which the inner driving-force of a society can be expressed and mobilized, the DD2 is doomed to failure.

This is why we would like to emphasize the need for "training, technical assistance, field work and strengthening of local institutions", capable of going to the core of

each culture, "rather than broad general research", (E/CN.5/445), done abstractly on a removed way from reality.

This reasoning applies to any group in the world. Hence, Madam Chairman, even if the report of the world social situation dwells more specifically on the so-called "developing countries", the process of development is something that concerns all nations. Without disregarding the tremendous disparities existing in the world, the millions of human beings in need of the minimal level of living my delegation wants to stress that development is a world-wide problem, and that each society, no matter how rich and highly industrialized it may be, has continuously to go through the process of its own development. Only through this way can external aid and technical assistance, acquire full human meaning.

It seems paradoxical to speak of one world-wide problem and, at the same time, to stress the diversity of approach needed in each situation.

However, the paradox can only be solved in a dialectical tension between the national reality and the world reality. It is in this tension, I believe, that unity of all nations takes its most dynamic root.

As conclusions, Madam Chairman, I would like to point out three items:

1) The 1970 report is a needed tool for DD2 but it represents only a preliminary work and could not be the only basis for evaluation of DD2.

2) The UNO system, if it wants to be efficient, cannot go in practice with the existing compartmentalization. The incongruity of the present situation has been felt and the suggestion made in the ECOSOC report that "within both the Council and the General Assembly, all questions

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relating to development should be considered by a single body". (ECOSOC report, XV social dev, para. 521)

We can only stress this need very strongly.

3) My delegation would like to plead for a visible translation of the true diversity embodied in this Assembly in assuming that social policy and planning is culturally rooted and should be dealt with as such, in future research programs. The Portuguese delegation is convinced that such an approach would be a help for national development as well as for the fulfilment of the United Nations goals of peace and happiness in the world.

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