Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of the Bureau on your election. I assure you of DESA’s full cooperation and assistance in your work.

The collective expertise of this important Committee is vital to moving development forward in a just and sustainable manner. The wide range of social development issues discussed here allows us to centre our efforts on ensuring that all members of our global society reach their full potential.

Distinguished delegates:

Over the past year, the international community has continued to strive to put people at the centre of development.

The lasting impacts of the global financial and economic crisis brought to the fore the importance of decent work and job security, particularly amidst the continued high rates of youth unemployment.

The Rio+20 follow-up processes highlight the importance of coherent development policies that operate at the nexus of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

For example, the International Year of Cooperatives advocated for making people and their well-being the bottom line, including in the operation of successful businesses.
At the same time, preparations for the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, which takes place in 2014, highlights the need to empower families. Not only as beneficiaries, but also as agents of development.

The first ever World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014 will provide another unique opportunity to engage in open dialogue with indigenous peoples about matters that affect them, and to discuss their priorities for the future.

At the recently-concluded high-level meetings on disability and development, and on achieving the MDGs, Member States further highlighted the need to make certain that the voices of all persons are heard, and that their perspectives and concerns are counted.

Thus, the involvement, recognition and priorities of youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples, are essential to secure a sustainable development agenda beyond 2015.

Excellencies,

Although we have made good progress in improving social development on a global scale, progress continues to be uneven. While many individuals and social groups have benefited from poverty reduction and social integration, others remain far behind. Inequality continues to plague our efforts.

Why does this matter?

It matters because, in many countries and regions, inequality is compromising the health, nutrition and education of large segments of society. It also limits job prospects and participation in social, political and economic life.

It matters because, historically, inequalities have led to the consistent exclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, among others.

It matters because inequality undermines inclusive economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Excellencies,

We need to ensure that our social, economic and political structures are inclusive and accessible to all. They should enable all members of society to build their human and social capital.

A comprehensive policy approach will be required to meet these challenges. We must strike an effective balance of growth-enhancing macroeconomic policies and environmental sustainability with inclusive social policies. We must reach the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, and quality education for all. We must ensure that quality health care services reach persons and families at all stages of life, and in the most remote areas of the planet.
Several successful strategies have been identified. I will mention just a few.

The Social Protection Floor Initiative is providing guidance on setting up the type of inclusive social policies that work.

Agricultural growth and diversification of rural economies has lifted millions of people out of poverty.

The benefits of fiscal stimuli and the dangers of prolonged austerity measures have become clear.

Active labour market policies and income support have shown their merits.

The advantages of participatory decision-making are evident.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

The United Nations work on social development has reached an important juncture. With fewer than 850 days remaining for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, we must intensify our efforts for their achievement by 2015. At the same time, Member States are affirming a strong post-2015 development agenda, which will build on the foundations laid by the MDGs, complete the unfinished business and address to new challenges. Your work here is fundamental to the success of these efforts.

Mr Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

I thank you again for the opportunity to speak here today. I can assure you that my Department and I will do our best to facilitate the important work of your Committee.

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