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STATEMENT BY

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ON AGENDA ITEM 27

'SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT'

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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you and other members of the Bureau on your election and for chairing this important Committee. I assure you of my delegation’s full support and cooperation in the deliberations and work of this Committee.

Mr. Chairman,

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development was a significant milestone that recognized the need for fostering international cooperation in promoting social development. It identified three priority areas: poverty eradication; creation of employment opportunities and decent jobs; and fostering just, social and stable societies.

While progress has been recorded in all three major pillars of Social Development, many challenges remain to be overcome.

As the Secretary General’s report points out, in the aftermath of recent global financial and economic crisis, widening inequality, high and volatile food and fuel prices and environmental risks, have all been frustrating efforts to promote social development aimed at enhancing the well-being and quality of life of people.

Mr. Chairman,

With over a billion people living in extreme poverty and hunger, we cannot afford but to make inclusive growth our priority. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that we collectively undertake growth stimulating policies to boost demand and create jobs.

At the Rio+20 Summit, the international community renewed its commitment to sustainable development, recognizing poverty to be the greatest global challenge. The post-2015 development agenda must continue to prioritize the eradication of poverty as its central objective.
Mr. Chairman,

In India, the key focus of the Government is to not only have sustainable economic growth but also an inclusive and equitable growth to benefit all sections of the society.

The Government has adopted a multi-pronged approach involving introduction of specific and targeted policies as well as institutional changes to improve delivery of services. We are scaling up domestic investment in several areas such as education, health, affordable housing etc.

Investments in skill-based training, vocational education and promotion of business opportunities are key ingredients for employment generation. We have also initiated steps to build linkages between the education system and our economic needs.

Inclusiveness and empowerment of people is also dependent on accessibility of information about their rights and entitlements made available by law and policy. The government has taken steps to address this aspect.

To illustrate the multi-dimensional nature of our interventions, let me briefly describe one programme - the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. It is the world’s largest cash for work programme, covering 53 million lower income rural households and providing them 100 days of employment annually. Fifty percent work is reserved for women; there is also reservation for disabled persons. This programme has helped break down social inequalities, empower rural people, build up rural infrastructure and revive economic growth.

Mr. Chairman,

The youth are the building blocks of future development. Our effort is to provide them meaningful opportunities for education, health and skills development so that they are fully equipped to chart out their destiny.

The Constitution guarantees universal compulsory education as a fundamental right for every child in the age group 6-14. The enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009 provided a
momentum to our efforts to address issues of equity and elimination of barriers in accessing education.

Initiatives in the field of education has led to India attaining nearly full enrolment in primary grades of schooling for both boys and girls and narrowing of gender gaps in middle and higher education.

Similarly, the Government’s flagship National Rural Health Mission and other innovative health interventions have led to increased life expectancy, increased rates of immunization of children, and substantial decline in infant and maternal mortality rates.

The Government has also recently enacted a comprehensive Food Security Act that covers around 2/3rd of our population and provides for an entitled quantity of food grains per month per individual.

Mr. Chairman,

The government has taken several measures to ensure that persons with disabilities and older persons lead a secure, dignified and productive life.

Our focus is to advance the inclusion of the persons with disabilities by enhancing their accessibility to education, healthcare and employment. Our efforts are underpinned by a comprehensive legal framework.

India is home to over 100 million old persons. The government has put in place appropriate policy and legal framework to address the requirements of financial security, health care and nutrition, shelter and appropriate financial incentives and discounts to senior citizens.

Mr. Chairman,

Inclusive social development is critically dependent on national policy action. States need to scale up mobilization of domestic resources through government reforms, prudent management of resources including natural resources, more effective taxation policies and growth in the job market.

There is, however, need to recognize that the domestic financing gap cannot be plugged through national efforts alone. This needs to be complemented by official development assistance which continues to fall significantly below commitments made by developed countries.
We must also not forget the crucial importance of international cooperation in realizing our goals on social development. Enhanced trade opportunities and market access, more investments, and flexible migration policies are all extremely important and relevant in addressing these challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

The goals that we set for ourselves in 1995 remain far from being realized. Let us redouble our collective efforts to ensure that economic and social development does not remain an aspiration for many, and that we translate this aspiration into a global reality.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.