Mr. Chairman,

Permit me to begin my address by congratulating you and your Bureau on your election to lead the Third Committee for the 68th session of the General Assembly. I have no doubt that you will be able to steer our deliberations to a successful conclusion.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, by Ethiopia on behalf of the African Group and by Lesotho on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). I should also like to thank the Secretary General for the reports he has submitted under this agenda item and to assure you that my delegation has carefully studied and taken note of the recommendations contained therein. Mr. Chairman, it also gives me great pleasure to welcome the appointment by the Secretary General of an Envoy on Youth earlier this year. This is a clear demonstration of the importance that our organisation views issues concerning our youths. My country strongly identifies with this commitment to the youth and as such we expect that he will endeavour to fully represent the concerns and aspirations of all young people, including those from our continent. We wish Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi nothing but success in the execution of his mandate.

It is now a widely acknowledged fact that there can be no successful development without the full inclusion of all in mainstream economic activities. Indeed any development model that does not address social and income inequality rests on a shaky foundation. It is with this realisation that, since 1980, Zimbabwe has sought to complement its economic policies with a strong social policy framework that ensures the possibility of social mobility for every section of the population regardless of their background. In the course of our development trajectory, we have also come to realise that the only way to ensure the full economic participation of a nation’s citizenry, particularly the disenfranchised, is to ensure their access to the means of production. Our conviction on this matter has been validated by several studies that have acknowledged the importance of access to means of production such as land, for the reduction of inequalities. Zimbabwe has already taken the most important steps towards ensuring access to the means of production for the indigenous population through the institution and implementation of the Land Reform programme and more recently, through the enactment of the Empowerment and Indigenisation Act. These measures have become the backbone of our poverty reduction strategy and have also contributed immensely to addressing the food security concerns of countless households.

Mr. Chairman,

The Secretary General’s report on “Promoting social integration through social cohesion” makes a case for the role of education and social protection in enhancing social cohesion and integration. Zimbabwe strongly believes that education does hold the key to an individual’s
social mobility and to fostering his or her full inclusion in all aspects of society. In this regard, Zimbabwe has strongly emphasised universal access to primary education in its development. In fact MDG Goal number two is among the goals that are on track for Zimbabwe. One of the ways in which we have pursued the achievement of this goal is through the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) whereby orphans and other vulnerable children, including those with disabilities, receive state assistance in paying their school fees. However, even as we race towards achieving universal primary education, we realise that primary education is only the first step towards building a strong human capital base and improving the lives of future generations: the future for Zimbabwe and indeed for Africa as a whole, also lies in expanding access to higher and tertiary education and skills training. As we work towards this end, it is also critical to ensure a more robust synergy between our education sector and industry as this will contribute towards reducing unemployment particularly among the young generation. We are therefore committed to work with all relevant stakeholders and partners to ensure that the requisite investments in the education sector are made. In this way, no young person will be deprived of his or her opportunity to receive quality education from the primary to the tertiary level. We heed the message, however, that we must educate employable people. Relevance of skills is an essential focus in all this.

Similarly, Zimbabwe remains convinced of the importance of ensuring adequate social protection to support and complement the various economic empowerment programmes that have been instituted. We understand that the availability of free education will not, on its own, ensure school attendance if, for example a family is struggling to ensure its food security. There is therefore need to introduce social protection measures that will cushion impoverished households while they wait for the longer term empowerment programmes to bear fruit. In Zimbabwe such measures have included cash transfers to poor households particularly those with high dependence rations engendered by the presence of orphaned or chronically ill members. We are especially mindful of households led by children.

Mr. Chairman,

Specific efforts targeting particular social groups such as people with disabilities, older persons as well as women and youth remain at the core of our economic and social development agenda. Zimbabwe is a nation with a strong culture of extended families that has historically ensured that not only are older persons venerated but that they are well cared for in their old age. However, the effects of globalisation and the years of economic hardship that we have endured for more than a decade have placed considerable strain on the social fabric of our nation as well as on the capacity of families to adequately guarantee the wellbeing of their elderly. This has necessitated the decisive involvement of the state to ensure the protection of the elderly who, due to the ravages of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, have often been rendered de facto heads of households despite their advanced age and diminished capacities. This involvement culminated in the adoption, in October 2012, of the Older Persons Act which makes provisions for income security, health assistance and other developmental needs and services for older persons.
On persons with disabilities, Zimbabwe has also recently ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Let me assure you that this most recent measure that we have taken to ensure the fulfilment of the rights of persons with disabilities and their full inclusion in mainstream economic activity is not a mere political statement of will; it represents an intensification of Government’s active engagement in this area that spans more than two decades since we enacted the Disabled Persons Act in 1992.

Although Zimbabwe has focused on distinct social groups in its efforts to ensure that no one is left behind as the nation develops, we remain cognisant of the fact that empowerment must go beyond group focused approaches and encompass the nation as a whole. One of the ways of ensuring a holistic impact of social policy is through initiatives that target the family. The family institution is indeed the most fundamental group unit in society and as such deserves protection and support by the State. In recognition of this status of the family, the Zimbabwean Government has also emphasised family support systems in its social protection. An example is the Harmonised Social Cash Transfer scheme that is intended to strengthen food availability for poor and labour constrained households through unconditional monthly cash income injections which vary depending on household size.

Mr. Chairman,

As I conclude, let me stress that all the initiatives that we have underlined here stem from a deep seated commitment by Zimbabwe to reduce inequality in our society. To that effect, we are supportive of calls that have been made on the need to ensure that the post 2015 development agenda reflects the need to address inequalities. Initiatives towards reducing inequalities must be based on a strong, evidence-based analysis of their root causes. Furthermore, while we strongly support and are committed to the provision of basic social protection for the poorest and most vulnerable sections of our societies, we believe that in the long run, social protection on its own cannot sustain a nation’s drive for social integration and cohesion. It will only be effective when complemented by policies that address the root causes of social and income inequalities and emphasise capacity building geared towards enabling people to lift themselves out of poverty and live their lives in dignity. As the old saying goes “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”. This must be the ultimate goal that underpins all our social policies.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman!