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THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION

Text of Statement made by the Canadian Representative, Mrs. Sally Merchant, in the Third Committee on the World Social Situation, on November 23, 1967.

We would like at the outset to congratulate Mrs. Ingar Thorsson on her appointment and welcome her here in her new capacity. We would particularly thank her for her very lucid and illuminative presentation here this morning. She has expressed many thoughts and concerns in which we heartily concur and we want to assure Mrs. Thorsson of Canada's fullest support.

In fact, we have found her report so very useful and so comprehensive that we are prompted to ask if the Bureau would consider circulating copies among the members of the Committee. It seems to us that in printed form it would be an even more valuable basis for constructive discussion in this Committee.

It is appropriate to take this occasion to pay tribute to Miss Julia Henderson who, as the former Director of the Bureau of Social Affairs, has immeasurably assisted the work of the Commission over so many years. I would commend to this Committee's attention the statement made by Miss Henderson to the Committee for Programme and Coordination on May 12 of this year. Miss Henderson succinctly analyzed the evolution of the social development program of the United Nations through five successive stages, each succeeding stage characterized by a greater awareness that specific social problems in the world cannot be dealt with in isolation but must be understood in the context of the whole social, cultural and economic environment, and solutions found accordingly. My delegation suggests that this is the perspective from which we should view the reports before us.

The Canadian delegation has reviewed with a great deal of interest the Report of the Secretary-General on the World Social Situation (Document A/6826) in which the major items to be considered under this agenda item are identified. Before commenting on the Report and the other related documents, my delegation wishes to express its satisfaction with the decision taken at last year's Assembly and by this year's Third Committee to accord a high priority to this item on our agenda. We are all painfully aware that the world social situation, particularly as it refers to the living conditions of people in less developed countries,

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continues to present problems - to which solutions must be found. This Committee is faced with constant reassessment of continually emerging problems in this respect. It must make responsible judgements as to the value or otherwise of the efforts being made. The Committee must guard very carefully that the directions that are followed do in fact produce significant improvement in the world social situation. Great gains have been made. But there are great distances left to go. The Canadian Government regards the topic under discussion, the World Social Situation, as perhaps the single most important topic that this Committee could discuss. To discover the means of alleviating the manifold problems to implement them is the greatest contribution to human kind that can be made. We regard the discussion of this item with the utmost seriousness.

Before commenting on specific items the Canadian Delegation would like to express its general approval of the Report of the Secretary-General. This report indicates quite clearly that considerable progress has been made during the last year in implementing ECOSOC Resolution 1139 (XLI) in essence constitutes a reappraisal of the role of the Social Commission - or as it is now named, the Commission for Social Development. The Report indicates too that there is progress towards other objectives set by the General Assembly in Resolution 2215 (XXI). My delegation is very much in accord with the directions that are being taken by the Commission for Social Development, in particular with the evident efforts towards coordination.

The Canadian delegation would like to express its very sincere approval and appreciation for the response on the part of the Commission at its 18th Session to the broad mandate given to it. We believe these efforts have been productive and are confident that as new ideas, new relationships and new procedures find acceptance in all relevant parts of the United Nations family, the Commission will be able to fulfill entirely the expanded role assigned to it. We wish to note particularly the closer liaison that is developing between the Commission, the Specialized Agencies and other operational bodies within the United Nations system. These strengthened and in some cases new relationships should facilitate the necessary integration of the formulation of development policy on the one hand, and program execution on the other. Canadian delegations have on many occasions urged just such integration of effort as now appears to be a real possibility. We believe that the disposition of financial resources available through the United Nations for development assistance should more accurately than it has hitherto done, reflect the inter-relationships between all aspects of development -- social, economic and cultural. Effective change and advance dictate a very real need to proceed on an integrated basis.

The Secretary-General's report notes the steps that have been taken to implement ECOSOC Resolution 1139 (XLI). Having already expressed general satisfaction with the progress that has been made I merely wish at this time to comment on two or three items which I believe warrant this Committee's attention. The decision taken by the Commission to examine the technical cooperation activities in the social field is most important. My delegation is in accord with the decision to have five

special rapporteurs undertake this study and to that end we fully support Council Resolution 1227 (XLII) which invites Member States, the UNDP, UNICEF and the Specialized Agencies to cooperate with the rapporteurs in carrying out this task. It is most important in our view that a critical assessment be undertaken of current programs and methods and that ways be found to strengthen working relationships. Indeed it is requisite to the wise disposition of financial resources and to the integration of effort that is basic to success.

The report also notes another significant step that will enhance the Commission's ability to prepare policy recommendations for consideration by the Economic and Social Council and through that Council by the General Assembly. I refer to the preparation of policy reports by the Specialized Agencies in cooperation with the Secretary-General, the first of which, prepared by the World Health Organization, was considered at the Commission's 18th Session. These reports will provide a built-in mechanism by which the Commission for Social Development can review policy and evaluate progress in specific fields of activity. This is information and evaluation that we regard as absolutely necessary to the subsequent preparation of sound inter-sectoral policy.

A word should be said about the work program of the Commission for Social Development, in other words, that portion of the work of the Secretariat that relates directly to the Commission - studies, training programmes and the like. From time to time reservations have been expressed as to the practical results achieved and in consequence of this, and in keeping with Resolution 1139 (XLI), certain revisions have been made. My delegation finds itself in agreement with the gradual revisions and is of the view that the work program proposed by the Commission and approved by ECOSOC reflects a satisfactory balance between the needs of broad long range policy formulation, and the more specific sectoral activity. We believe, however, that the Commission may need to give more attention in future to the establishment of priorities, a task which we realize is most difficult to accomplish to the satisfaction of all delegations. While some delegations have had reservations regarding the work program, there can be little disagreement as to the value of the periodic reports on the World Social Situation. While there has been debate on the feasibility of producing the report every three years, there has been little criticism of its essential importance. Unless there is accurate information on the overall social situation and current trends, the effectiveness of national and international development can hardly be assessed. In this regard, it is self-evident that the development of adequate statistical data in both the economic and social spheres is absolutely basic if the World Social Situation Report is to become an accurate progress report on development. And in my delegation's view, this is and must continue to be the essential function of the Report. We further believe that the inevitable and fundamental relationships between reports on economic conditions and reports on social conditions, must be taken into consideration. If it is accepted that economic growth should be measured in terms of social progress, and my delegation believes that it should, there would be considerable merit in a greater integration of the reports.

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Allied to this is the matter of the Draft Declaration for Social Development, a subject thoroughly debated by this Committee last year. It has also been dealt with in the Secretary-General's report before us. My delegation is pleased with the progress that has been made in preparing an initial draft but is of the view that care must be taken not to prejudice the successful preparation of a Draft Declaration by attempting to rush its completion. It would be desirable therefore to reconsider operative paragraph 3 of Resolution 2215 which, as it now stands, requires the submission of the Draft to the 23rd Session of the General Assembly - that is, next year. Our reasons for making this suggestion are twofold. First of all, we agree with the decision taken to ensure that all relevant bodies within the United Nations Organization be fully consulted in the process of preparation and we agree that adequate time should be allowed for the drafting of the Declaration, taking all comments into account. Secondly, we believe that in the actual preparation of the Draft Declaration, or in commenting upon it, all parties will wish to give the most serious consideration to its most essential features and to the way in which it can be used to foster the integration of economic and social development effort, about which so much has been said in recent years. In this regard, the Canadian delegation has noted the view advanced in that very important document -- The United Nations Development Decade, Proposals for Action. This document, basic to the activity of the last few years, made the point, in 1963, that development is a process of qualitative change and quantitative growth of the social and economic reality. This concept has been expressed in different words on many occasions both before and since that report was issued. It was examined critically in the Third Report issued by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. I mention these background facts by way of stressing the importance we attach to the opportunity afforded to all Member States by the preparation of a Draft Declaration on Social Development, to state in clear terms the social aims of all development, and the necessity of integrating all policy and operational activities into a total process of development. As we near the end of the first development decade and as we face the unhappy fact that goals, even modest goals have not been reached, and as we begin to think of proposals for the next development period, it is vitally important that the efforts of individual nations and of the international community to improve the world social situation do not suffer from fragmentation of thought and effort.

The topic under discussion is one of many facets. We have chosen to comment on only a very few. There are other notable examples of the means through which we feel there is hope for improvement in the World Social Situation, most of which have been so well described by the Director of the Commission. We think of the forthcoming 1968 Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare - of the tremendously important work undertaken by the United Nations Research and Training for Regional Development - of the centre for Housing Building and Planning to meet needs that are so crucial in some areas of the world, as Mrs. Thorsson illustrated earlier this morning. We think of the Specialized Agencies - of UNICEF and other organizations whose contributions are so vital. It would be impossible, to point to a single influence that we consider more important than another.

Let me say again that the Canadian Government regards the activities broadly covered under the agenda item "World Social Situation" - as an area of endeavour on the part of the United Nations that holds the key to real advance in the personal circumstances of people in every part of the world which is the highest goal that we can serve. Canada looks upon it with great concern and hopes that this Committee will accord it even higher priority in future deliberations.