



Statement

by

Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
and
High Representative for the Least Developed Countries,
Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States

on the
agenda item 56:

- Eradication of poverty and other development issues
- (a) Implementation of the first United Nations
Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006)
 - (b) Women in development
 - (c) Human resources development

in the Second Committee
of the 60th session of the UN General Assembly

New York, 14 November 2005

Mr. Chairman,

I thank you for this opportunity to me and my Office for making a statement on agenda item 56 on “Eradication of Poverty and Other Development Issues”.

On the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October this year, in a statement, I had stated that “The world has adequate resources and the institutional capacity to help the poorest of the poor get out of their dehumanizing condition. What remains inadequate is concrete and consistent action to turn the promises of the last decade into reality for the more than one billion people trapped in the hellhole of extreme poverty.” The theme of this year’s International Day was: “Achieving the MDGs : Empowering the poorest of the poor.” General Assembly’s President Jan Eliasson very rightly said that “The United Nations must never lose sight of those who rely on us most: the poorest and most vulnerable in the world.”

As the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997– 2006) is drawing to a close, unfortunately poverty has increased in the majority of the poorest and weakest segment of the international community – the world’s 50 Least Developed Countries (LDCs). As we observed the International Day last month and as we debate today this important item of the agenda of the UN General Assembly, the peoples of the world should not forget the 370 million fellow human beings stricken by extreme poverty in these countries. It is also alarming to note that that number is projected to rise by 100 million more by 2015, the year the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved.

This year’s deliberations in the Committee under the poverty eradication item covers three inter-related dimensions of poverty and efforts linked to its eradication – employment, women and human resources development. The three reports of the Secretary-General focusing on these dimensions bring out very clearly the key elements that need the Committee’s attention and appropriate action. One common element that is relevant and requires your special attention is the situations in the Least Developed Countries which need the international community’s determined action to support them overcome the challenges of job creation, gender mainstreaming and human capacity development. The Brussels Programme of Action for the LDCs has highlighted the need for action in these areas by both the LDCs and their development partners. I would also like to draw attention to the outcome of the Extraordinary Session of the African Union in Burkina Faso in September 2004 on promotion of employment and poverty alleviation which has significant relevance for the LDCs as 34 out 50 belong to that region.

While in general developing countries have made progress in reducing poverty over the last decade, in sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for 34 LDCs, the level of extreme poverty has increased from 200 million to 300 million, particularly affecting children and women. Sub-Saharan Africa also has the highest level of working poor: 55.8 per cent of all the employed live in this part of the world on less than \$ 1 a day. We need to recognize that the LDCs do not have the domestic capacity – be it financial, human or institutional – to reverse this negative trend without external support. It is a

reality that without significant and well-coordinated external support, the LDCs would not achieve the Millennium Development Goal of reducing extreme poverty by half by the target year 2015, -- and here I would stress that even the world as a whole would not achieve the goal if these 50 most vulnerable countries are left behind.

While LDCs have taken big strides in creating an enabling environment for poverty eradication, including undertaking extensive economic and governance reforms to attract foreign direct investment and mobilize more domestic resources, the results fall far short of expectations. What LDCs need to rid themselves of the scourge of poverty is freedom from the crushing debt burden and increased external resources for development to generate employment that has central role in poverty eradication and to benefit from opportunities resulting from such support.

The Report of the Secretary-General relating to employment identifies three characteristics of the working poor in developing countries which merit particular attention: the feminization of poverty, the preponderance of poor people in agriculture, and the increasingly informal nature of employment and work. These phenomena are more starkly manifested in respect of the Least Developed Countries. Though employment of women has steadily increased over the past ten years now composing 40 per cent of the world work force, the disturbing reality is that of increasing feminization of poverty. Even when employed, it is a fact that women continue to be concentrated in more precarious groups of employment that offer low wages and little job security. Not only do women continue to have higher unemployment rates and lower wages than men, they also represent 60 per cent of the world's working poor.

In the African LDCs, seven out of 10 people work in agriculture. According to the latest ILO World Employment Report, the growth of agricultural productivity is the strongest predictor of the reduction of extreme poverty. The informal sector as a major employment sector of the poor with a large representation of women has been growing significantly in the LDCs and now accounts for more than 45 per cent of their Gross National Income (GNI). Because of the significance of this sector for the LDCs, it is crucial to develop both short-term and long-term approaches on how to increase productivity in the informal sector as well as to gradually formalize the work in this sector. Lifting workers in the informal sector out of poverty should be a strategic high-priority both at the national and international levels. Also, in an inter-connected way, it is a matter of serious concern that in the LDCs in general, youth unemployment remains twice as high as the total rate.

It is worth underscoring that no poverty reduction strategy in LDCs could be successful without creation of productive employment with special attention to the women and the youth.

Let me conclude by drawing the Committee's attention that this has been the International Year of Microcredit. The UN General Assembly, as early as 1997, had recognized microcredit as an effective tool of poverty eradication and as having a strong empowerment role, particularly for women. As a people-centered initiative and with all

50 LDCs having on-going programmes, microcredit also has close relationship with the issues that are being deliberated here today as it contributes to the creation of employment, empowerment of women and development of human resources.
