

birth—particularly in developing countries. It analysed the relationship between trends in the world economy and in the social situation, including projections in economic conditions, population, health and education to the year 2000, traced the impact of structural adjustment and of the developing countries' external indebtedness on the social situation and examined the likely impact on the 1990s of developments in the 1980s, especially the substantially changed perceptions as to the nature of policies to address economic and social problems and public demand for government accountability.

The report found that although sustained high growth in Asia's larger countries ensured that one third of the total population in developing countries benefited from a growth rate in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita exceeding 3 per cent a year in the 1980s, in the remaining two thirds it grew by no more than 1 per cent a year. At the end of the decade, some 20 per cent of the world's population, or about 1 billion people, lived in conditions of absolute poverty, of whom 55 per cent were concentrated in Asia and 38 per cent in Africa. There was ample evidence of a deterioration in living conditions and an aggravation of problems of poverty in virtually all major regions of developing countries; on the other hand, progress was possible in some areas in spite of economic difficulties, notably in health.

The report noted the strong correlation between economic and social conditions; thus, in countries where the GDP per capita was high, so were the social indicators. Several developing countries with low GDP per capita, however, had been able to secure some social conditions not far distant from those in high-income developed countries, due especially to public intervention to secure more egalitarian patterns of growth and access to social services, including provision of nutrition, health and education. New priorities arising from growth in population and changes in its composition, as well as a rapidly growing labour force and the increasing complexity and technical sophistication of all economies, would require involvement principally of Governments but also of private institutions in economic and social development.

Slow growth, stagnation and declines in per capita income adversely affected the social situation in developing countries, especially in Africa and Latin America, in many of which living conditions were lower in 1989 than they were in 1970. Apart from natural disasters, military conflicts and other calamities, structural adjustment and external indebtedness also had distinct effects on

the social situation. Transfers abroad to service debt directly reduced resources for domestic use. All these contributed to reducing current and future levels of investment and living standards.

Prospects for improvements in social conditions at the beginning of the 1990s, however, seemed far more propitious than at the beginning of the previous decade. Regional conflicts that caused enormous social misery had concluded or were proceeding to conclusion. Dramatic new opportunities had been opened for reducing armaments and expenditures on them. There was a fresh wind bringing countries together in co-operative endeavour seeking solutions to such global problems as acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), illicit drug production and trafficking and drug abuse, and environmental degradation. The evolution of the European Economic Community into one market presaged opportunities for faster growth in the Community's economies. Rapid changes in political and economic institutions in the USSR and Eastern Europe were likely to release new energies spurred by new incentives. The widespread application of new technologies that came into their own in the 1980s were expected to raise productivity, especially in developed countries.

The principal challenge of development in the 1990s, the report stated, was to reverse the negative trends that characterized the 1980s—problems of poverty on a mass scale, persistent malnutrition, recurrent starvation of large masses in sub-Saharan Africa—the necessary condition for which lay in the lightening of international debt burdens, as well as in a more open trading system. While the case for State provision of certain essential functions to improve social conditions remained unquestioned, a more dynamic private initiative had increasingly been seen as an important source of impulses to social and economic development. Barrier-breaking communications technologies and economic changes that accelerated the movement of ideas, capital and people in the 1980s had resulted in the emergence of a strengthened perception of a shared destiny of all mankind.

#### ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL ACTION

On 24 May, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 1990/28.

#### World social situation

The Economic and Social Council, Recalling its resolution 1989/72 of 24 May 1989 and taking note of General Assembly resolution 44/56 of 8 December 1989,

Bearing in mind that in paragraph 10 of General Assembly resolution 44/56 the Secretary-General was requested to submit an interim report on the world social