

STATEMENT BY DR ZOLA SKWEYIYA, SOUTH AFRICAN MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE TWENTY-FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 10 FEBRUARY 2005

Chairperson, my delegation associates itself with the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China. We also align ourselves with the statement that will be made by the Minister from Mauritius on behalf of Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Both the global Ten Year Review of the Outcome and Implementation of the Copenhagen Summit and the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration happily coincide with ten years of democracy in South Africa. This has allowed our Government to conduct a wide-ranging review of the accomplishments and challenges of the past decade.

The global expression of human solidarity with our freedom struggle resonates with the work we have undertaken to systematically dismantle the social inequalities resulting from the apartheid system. This solidarity has allowed us to create a society based on the principles of equity, social justice and social cohesion. For us, the struggle to eradicate poverty has been and will continue to be a central part of the national effort to build a new South Africa.

Chairperson, the framework provided by the Copenhagen Commitments has been of enduring value in assessing progress in building a more inclusive, participatory, stable, just and democratic society.

With regard to our economy, restructuring and improved management has resulted in almost continuous economic growth - but not enough to keep up with the increased number of people looking for employment. Government policies have freed resources for social expenditure by reducing the interest we have to pay on debt. This increased social spending has also been redistributive in favour of poorer households.

Significant progress has been made in addressing poverty by enhancing the income of poor households through social grants, by broadening access to basic social services and by increasing the ownership of assets as well as access to opportunities. Great strides have been made, but chronic poverty, which is exacerbated by the HIV and AIDS epidemic, continues to affect too many of our people. The AIDS epidemic is having a devastating impact on women and children, especially in rural areas. We cannot say that we have fully restored the rights and dignity of all our people as long as this situation persists.

Because of our particular history, the task of social integration remains in the foreground of our efforts. Many of the instruments used to prevent social exclusion are related to land issues, the emancipation of women and gender equality. Specific labour protection has contributed to normalizing social relations. While significant progress has been

made, there is evidence that discrimination in employment still exists. Unfortunately, there still remains a gender-based premium in the earnings of workers.

Another key element of our social integration efforts is the putting in place of policies and programmes that address the rights and needs of older persons, people with disabilities, and the youth. Enabling and sustaining the active participation of organizations representing these groups in the process of social development is a major determinant of success.

Through the Growth and Development Summit involving the public and private sectors, as well as labour unions, we have developed a consensus for a national agenda of skills development, employment creation and poverty eradication.

Chairperson, we meet at the time when the international community is preparing for the High-level Event in September 2005, to Review the Millennium Summit and the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. As South Africa, we believe that this is an important Summit which will need to balance a concern for global development and security issues.

The Millennium Project confirms that the MDGs are affordable and do able, given the necessary will. All Member States have to live up to their long standing commitments. The Millennium Project report, in assessing the extent to which various regions are on track to achieving the MDGs, underlines the fact that Africa continues to lag behind other regions and should be the focus of development efforts.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), is a tool for a fundamental economic and social transformation of our continent. Already, NEPAD has recorded success in having agriculture and infrastructure prioritised on the domestic and global agendas. A commitment to meeting explicit quantitative targets for technical and financial assistance is fundamental because extreme poverty is a violation of human rights and human dignity, and a threat to global security in an increasingly interdependent world.

Chairperson, the Review of Copenhagen has once again reminded us that without resources the implementation of the goals we set for ourselves will always be unreachable. The year 2005 offers us a great opportunity to live up to the global social contract we have with the poorest in our communities.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development we set quantifiable and time-bound targets. In Monterrey, we joined in a Consensus on the resources to achieve these goals. We therefore call on the international community to implement all the commitments we have made, especially the social commitments that are about improving the everyday lives of our people.

I thank you.