



**STATEMENT BY DR. M.S. GILL, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON PLENARY MEETING OF THE 60<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH IN THE 60<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 6, 2005**

Mr. President,

At the outset, please allow me to express deep appreciation for your introductory remarks. I would also like to thank you for providing us with this opportunity to review the progress made, at the Plenary level, in implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

It is a happy coincidence that three substantive reports on the youth have been presented by the Secretary-General, which provide a wider canvas of agenda for the Member States.

My Delegation wishes to take this opportunity to reaffirm its support for the initiatives taken by the United Nations for all-round development of youth so that they become key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation.

Mr. President

India is an ancient civilisation but a young society. Nearly 56% of the population is below the age of 24 years. India has been cognizant of the significant role of the youth in national reconstruction and social change. Accordingly, national youth policies have been evolved for composite and all-round development of the youth to enable them to develop a wider national perspective and to keep them strong at heart, body and mind. The thrust of our national Youth Policy centres on 'Youth Empowerment' in different spheres of national life. The youth development programmes devised in India over the years have focussed on personality development, qualities of citizenship, enhanced commitment to community service, social justice, self-reliance, national integration and humanism.

Mr. President,

The Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh has referred to the youth as "the building block of our nation". He has drawn attention to the fact that the attitude and outlook of youth to life and society plays a

determining role in shaping our destiny and our future.

Recognising the importance of providing opportunities to the youth in particular, the Government of India has oriented its employment guarantee programmes to accommodate and provide for the aspirations of the growing numbers of youth that access the job market every year. There is special emphasis on those that are disadvantaged, such as poor and rural youth. The National Rural Employment Act passed by the Indian Parliament in August this year, for the first time makes right to work a fundamental right. The Rural Employment Guarantee scheme, thus created, provides 100 days assured employment every year to every rural household. The Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) is designed to specifically train rural youth in skills to enable them to take up self-employment. The scheme stipulates that at least 40% of the beneficiaries should be women and 50% from socially backward groups.

Elementary education is now a Fundamental Right in India. The government has resolved to increase public spending in education to at least 6% of the GDP. At least half of this amount would be spent in the development of primary and secondary sectors. To pursue universal elementary education in a mission mode, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiya*, Universal Elementary Education Scheme, was launched in 1998 covering the entire country. Education above the secondary level has a high degree of vocationalisation to enable youth to acquire requisite skills as would augment avenues of employment for them. *Nehru Yuva Kendra Sanghathan*, national youth clubs, have spearheaded the Youth Club

Movement in the country by drawing up a multi-pronged strategy for empowering youth clubs and volunteers.

The Scheme of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in schools has been initiated to bridge the digital divide between students in rural areas and in metropolitan cities, as also to cover different socio-economic and geographic segments in the country. The National Service Scheme, popularly known as NSS, provides a platform for development of personality of student youth through community service. So far, 25 million students from institutions of higher learning have benefited from the NSS activities.

The health needs of the youth are at the core of development of health infrastructure in India. A holistic approach has been adopted, encompassing general, mental, physical and spiritual health of the youth. Among the priority areas, HIV/AIDS is no longer treated just as a public health issue but as the most serious socio-economic and developmental issue. The government spending on health has been significantly increased in the last decade, and it would be raised to at least 2-3% of GDP over the next five years with focus on primary health care. Promotion of environmental concern among youth and reducing vulnerability of young people from drug abuse has been part of the youth policies and programmes in India.

My delegation would like to propose a special focus on youth employment in the UN's work. In this connection, we welcome the efforts of Secretary-General in promoting the Youth Employment Network. We look forward to working with other

delegations to see how this Network can be developed in the coming months.

Mr. President,

The challenges ahead of us for all-round development of youth are daunting, but surely, with effective national and international efforts, surmountable. Issues related to the youth should be seen in the context of social and economic development in an age of information revolution and globalization. The potential for youth to be a major force in social change should receive greater attention than hitherto and should find an important place in future programmes and initiatives. To ensure that their concerns are properly factored into national policies and

programmes, we feel that there should be greater participation of youth in the political system of nations.

The Secretary-General's Report provides an incisive analysis on five new concerns relating to the youth, namely, globalisation, information and communication technologies, HIV/AIDS and young people, youth and conflict and intergenerational problems. Mr. President, my delegation would work with other delegations for their inclusion in the World Programme of Action for Youth as additional areas of priority.

Thank you Mr. President.

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