TO: Mr. Jean-Claude Milleron
A: Under-Secretary-General, DESIPA

FROM: S. Iqbal Riza
DE: Chef de Cabinet

DATE: 24 January 1997

SUBJECT: Forewords to the 1997 Report on the World Social Situation and Sustaining Social Security

1. I enclose herewith the approved texts of the forewords to the above-mentioned two volumes.

2. I believe the foreword to the 1997 Report, which is a major policy document, should be printed over the Secretary-General’s name and title. As the work on Sustaining Social Security is of a more technical nature, I would suggest that the foreword appear over your own name and title.
The 1997 Report on the World Social Situation is devoted to the central issues considered at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995. The Summit was an integral part of the continuum of world conferences convened by the United Nations in the 1990s to address human rights and key development issues, and represented a turning point in our collective consciousness regarding social issues. Inspired by a renewed spirit of solidarity, Member States pledged to fight the threats from common enemies: unemployment, exclusion, rural decline, urban decay, deterioration of the environment, and new and re-emerging diseases.

Following a presentation on current economic patterns at the global and regional levels and an overview of sectoral social issues, the Report examines selected aspects of the three main themes of the Summit: eradication of poverty, expansion of productive employment and social integration. Policy issues and options are analyzed from both the national and international perspective. The Report takes heed of the Summit’s strong advocacy of a systemic, holistic approach to development and puts forward a broad view of social policy which recognizes the interplay of social, economic and cultural factors.
Development programmes must, to be viable, have a strong focus on people. This focus must be coupled with empowerment, so that individuals and social groups can choose their own destiny in full knowledge of the consequences of their acts for present and future generations. The capacity to generate, disseminate and utilize knowledge and information is fundamental in this regard, as has been shown in societies which have succeeded in maintaining their cohesion, respecting human rights, sustaining democratic structures and promoting participatory and equitable development.

The Report provides an opportunity to ponder and reflect on these crucial issues in the closing years of the twentieth century. The intent is to generate further ideas as well as actions that will contribute to the realization of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development -- our blueprint for social development into the next century.

Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General
Social security questions have gained a new urgency around the world. In part, this is because personal economic insecurity has increased, or has been perceived to increase, in most societies. The decline in the prospects for assured long-term gainful employment is at the heart of this heightened concern. In many countries, this fear has been validated by an increase in the magnitude and persistence of unemployment. At the same time, because of longer life expectancy, there has been an increase in the proportion of those who are beyond working age and who therefore have no current earnings to sustain themselves.

Most societies accept some responsibility for those members without gainful employment or otherwise unable to meet their own immediate needs. However, the resources to meet the enlarged responsibilities in this sphere have come under increasing stress. In many societies, informal social structures, notably the family, have traditionally assumed responsibility for those who had no means of livelihood. However, these structures have themselves changed and are no longer so effective as safety nets. Of particular importance, families are smaller and have fewer members of working age to support those who are not working.
The social security provided by governments as a complement to these informal structures varies greatly in nature and magnitude from country to country. Almost universally, however, government systems are or soon will be facing severe resource constraints. The need for change and reform is clear. Governments considering how they can best meet the needs of their citizens must do so in light of an increasingly competitive and integrated international economic environment.

Some countries have already embarked on reform of their state social security arrangements. They have shown that there is no universal solution to the challenges; the road to sustainability has to be attuned to each country’s own economic and social circumstances.

The present volume presents specific experiences of a few of these countries and examines some of the common issues they faced in the hope that such a sharing of both practice and analysis will enable others to improve the effectiveness of their response to the needs of the disadvantaged within their societies.

Jean-Claude Milleron
Under-Secretary-General
for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis
The practice for the past few years has been for the Secretary-General to sign the Foreword for major reports and surveys.

Accordingly, I wish to bring to your attention two publications prepared by the Department, and inquire whether the Secretary-General wishes to sign these forewords.

The first one is for the quadrennial Report on the World Social Situation to be submitted to the Commission for Social Development at their meeting to be held in New York from 25 February to 6 March 1997. The second one is for a volume entitled Sustaining Social Security, which we propose to make available to the Commission as a background document.

Please find attached both draft forewords together with the prefaces, which provide information on these publications. A copy of the full text of the publications will be made available, if so required.