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Foreword

The 1990s began with a great surge of hope. With the cold war over, the world could harness its enormous resources for development and prosperity. During the first six years of the 1990s world conferences and summit meetings emphasized the urgency of eradicating poverty. The World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen—attended by representatives of 185 governments and an unprecedented 117 heads of state and government—sharpened this focus. Countries committed themselves to the goal of eradicating poverty “as an ethical, social, political and moral imperative of human-kind” and recognized people-centred development as the key to achieving it.

In parallel, poverty eradication has become an overarching goal of international action—and of the United Nations system’s work in the followup to the UN conferences and summits. The social development summit’s programme of action calls on the United Nations Development Programme “to undertake efforts to support the implementation of social development programmes”. UNDP has made the eradication of poverty its overriding priority. As the principal antipoverty arm of the United Nations, it is well placed to work with other parts of the UN system, especially its sister organizations and agencies at the country level, to assist states in their programmes to eradicate poverty. Already UNDP is working with more than 70 countries to follow up on the commitment made at Copenhagen.

This year’s *Human Development Report* builds on that commitment. Its most important message is that poverty is no longer inevitable. The world has the material and natural resources, the know-how and the

people to make a poverty-free world a reality in less than a generation. This is not woolly idealism but a practical and achievable goal. Over the past three decades a dozen or more developing countries have shown that it is possible to eliminate absolute poverty. And most industrial countries had largely eradicated absolute poverty by the 1970s, although some have slipped in the past decade.

Poverty is not to be suffered in silence by the poor. Nor can it be tolerated by those with the power to change it. The challenge now is to mobilize action—state by state, organization by organization, individual by individual.

Poverty has many faces. It is much more than low income. It also reflects poor health and education, deprivation in knowledge and communication, inability to exercise human and political rights and the absence of dignity, confidence and self-respect. There is also environmental impoverishment and the impoverishment of entire nations, where essentially everyone lives in poverty. Behind these faces of poverty lies the grim reality of desperate lives without choices and, often, governments that lack the capacity to cope.

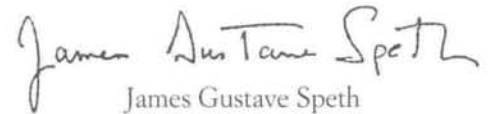
This year’s Report offers ideas for eradicating absolute poverty. The agenda includes but goes beyond income, encompassing gender, pro-poor growth, globalization and governance.

As in previous years, this year’s *Human Development Report* is the fruit of a collaborative effort by a team of eminent consultants and the Human Development Report team. Richard Jolly, my Special Adviser, together with Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Director, Human Development Report Office, led the effort.

The analysis and policy recommendations in this Report do not necessarily reflect the views of UNDP, its Executive Board or its Member States. The independence of views and the professional integrity of its authors ensure that the conclusions and recommendations will have the greatest possible audience.

New York
May 1997

As always, this is an innovative and thought-provoking report. I welcome the publication of *Human Development Report 1997* as an important contribution to the international momentum for eradicating absolute poverty. Some 160 years ago the world launched a successful campaign against slavery. Today we must all help to lead a similar campaign against poverty.


James Gustave Speth

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GDI	Gender-related development index
GEM	Gender empowerment measure
HDI	Human development index
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HPI	Human poverty index
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	Purchasing power parity
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization