



Statement by the International Council on Social Welfare, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

I am speaking on behalf of the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), a global non-governmental organization devoted to promoting social justice, social welfare and social development. ICSW welcomes the decision of the Commission for Social Development to make issues pertinent to the empowerment of people the focus of the Commission's deliberations at its 51st session. Empowering people has many facets but its positive outcome downstream is to enlarge life choices, enhance productive capacities and advance human well-being. People who are empowered have better chances to bring about desired changes at all levels and shape their own options. In that context, social protection—a vital component of a forward-looking social policy—plays an increasingly important role in promoting the empowerment of people to tackle poverty, in ensuring income security and in addressing sharp declines in incomes. Social protection is also strongly linked to the decent work agenda and facilitates the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and individuals.

There is strong evidence at the country level that universal access to basic social protection is beneficial, not only for vulnerable groups but also for society as a whole. Social protection is both a social and an economic necessity. Only people who are well nourished, well educated and as healthy as possible and who have been brought up in socially secure families will in the long run be productive contributors to national and global economies and constructive, participating and responsible members of society. Social protection, and notably a floor of social protection, is thus a prerequisite investment for the empowerment of people.

The ICSW supports universal social protection, considering it a crucial element of people-centred development and an important enabling factor conducive to protecting human rights, developing human potential and reducing income inequalities. In that light we consider Recommendation No. 202 of the International Labour Conference concerning national floors of social protection, adopted unanimously in mid-June 2012 by the ILO member states and social partner organizations, to be an important step forward toward universalism in the provision of social protection.

Given that many countries are still coping with the devastating impact of the current financial and economic crisis, the adoption of the basic social guarantees envisioned by the Social Protection Floor (SPF) initiative can make social protection schemes available to those individuals and families who are suffering most. It is a matter of human compassion but not compassion alone, if we pay attention to the enabling functions of social protection. We believe that social protection schemes could be more easily implemented within strategies that envision the extension of social security to all of the people in society, including those in the informal sector prevalent in many developing countries.

Confronting global economic inequalities, as well as growing inequalities in income and wealth within countries, represents a serious policy challenge, with both national and international implications. Empirical studies provide clear evidence that inequalities have detrimental effects on economic growth, the access of the population to educational and health services, and social cohesion. Inequalities in income make the attainment of several MDG goals highly problematic, affecting the labour market and employment generation, which creates a vicious circle of perpetual inequalities. Inequalities that have not been addressed through a coherent public policy can only undermine even the best efforts aimed at promoting the empowerment of people. Governments in many countries should pursue specific policies aimed at improving economic outcomes through inequality-reducing measures and by mainstreaming strategies to

combat poverty and inequality across the board. The proactive role of the state is indispensable to sustainably constraining rising inequalities.

The role of national legal systems in establishing basic income security guarantees is paramount, in terms of adopting new laws and regulations specifically aligned with the ideas of the SPF initiative, as well as introducing legal instruments aimed at better monitoring the SPF.

Civil society organizations should be also involved in design and implementation of SPF programmes, in partnership with other stakeholders. Governments and international organizations should help to create a space for civil society in the national policy design and policy outcome monitoring process.

The role of civil society in monitoring SPF implementation is essential. Monitoring and benchmarking national situations against those of countries in similar socio-economic situations can help to create the policy space that is needed to extent or complete the national social protection floors. Civil society organizations are best placed to undertake or contribute to that national monitoring by taking the real-life situations of individual residents into account. Real monitoring should always be bottom-up rather than top-down – from the people to the aggregate statistics and not vice versa. That creates conditions for the empowerment of people with respect to a crucial instrument needed for their well-being and development.

Given that the positive impact of social protection, particularly in the form of universal schemes, goes beyond stop-gap measures aimed at cushioning the most vulnerable segments of the population during times of economic crisis from the negative impact of shocks, the establishment of social protection floors should be viewed as a long-term investment on the part of society to promote human development and build human potential. It is imperative to prevent the decline in social spending during the hard times of economic downturn because the erosion of human potential and human well-being might have unpredictable negative consequences for social development in the long-run.

Taking into account the widely recognized productive role the social protection plays in society - the role emphasized by many member states during deliberations of this session of the Commission - ICSW supports focusing on a full range of measures and schemes geared at making social protection an integral part of society. We urge the Commission to consider adoption of a specific, dedicated resolution endorsing the creation of national floors of social protection, firmly placing this important issue on the agenda of the Commission for Social Development and ECOSOC.

We also explicitly support the joint proposal of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights to create a special Global Fund for Social Protection. Civil society organizations can promote the creation or completion of national social protection floors much more easily if there is an international facility that co-finances or re-insures national efforts. The present global movement for social protection presents a unique opportunity to create the policy space and trigger the political will for social protection at the national level. And as we said, social protection is a sine qua non for the real and sustainable empowerment of people.

Thank you.
