



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving  
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment  
and decent work for all**

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

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## Statement

The International Council on Social Welfare, a global non-governmental organization devoted to promoting social justice, social welfare and social development, welcomes the decision of the Commission for Social Development to make issues pertinent to the empowerment of people the focus of the 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 organization 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 in June 2012, to be an important step forward towards universalism in the provision of social protection.

International Labour Organization (ILO) document GB.316/INS/5/1 provides a summary of that path-breaking recommendation, including its guidance that members should, in accordance with national circumstances, establish as quickly as possible and maintain their social protection floors comprising basic social security guarantees which together secure effective access to goods and services defined as necessary at the national level. National social protection floors should comprise at least the following social security guarantees:

- Access to essential health care for all, including maternity care
- Basic income security for children, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services
- Basic income security for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability
- Basic income security for older persons

According to the recommendation, countries should monitor progress in implementing social protection floors and achieving other objectives of national

social security extension strategies. This should include regularly convening national consultations to assess progress and discuss policies for the further horizontal and vertical extension of social security.

The recommendation thus gives concrete content to the human right to social security, while leaving maximum discretion to country-based design and implementation.

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 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 Millennium Development 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 social protection floor initiative has been endorsed by many countries and international organizations, including the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the World Bank and the European Union. 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 social protection floor initiative, as well as introducing legal instruments aimed at better monitoring the social protection floor.

The recommendation requests national monitoring of progress. The role of civil society in monitoring social protection floor implementation is essential. Monitoring and benchmarking national situations against those of countries in similar socioeconomic situations can help to create the policy space that is needed to extend 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.

Governments and international organizations should help to create a space for civil society in the national policy design and policy outcome monitoring process. In that context, we support the position taken by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, that poverty is an urgent human rights concern in itself and that it is “both a cause and a consequence of human rights violations and an enabling condition for other violations” (A/HRC/21/39, para. 3).

Given that the positive impact of social protection, particularly in the form of universal schemes, goes beyond stopgap 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.

We explicitly support the joint proposal of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food and the 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. Juan Somavia, the former Director General of ILO, once rightly said that the world does not lack the resources to eradicate poverty; it lacks the right priorities. 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.

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