

## News from our societies – ICSW: A new social contract

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The year 2020 will go down in history as the year in which the pandemic spread across the world.

The pandemic itself poses a massive challenge for humanity. But the consequences of the pandemic are equally or even more serious. The pandemic has directed the spotlight towards deficiencies and inequalities that we have known about but ignored for decades, such as deficient healthcare systems, shortcomings in social safety nets, structural differences, environmental destruction and climate crisis.

The work on fighting poverty that has been going on around the world has in only a short period of time been thrown back several years. COVID-19 has caused the deepest collapse in the world economy since World War II and the biggest collapse of incomes since 1870. Around 100 million people may end up in extreme poverty. A famine of historical proportions may be upon us.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said,

COVID-19 has been likened to an x-ray revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built. It is exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere. The lie that free markets can deliver healthcare for all. The fiction that unpaid care work is not work. The delusion that we live in a post-racist world. The myth that we are all in the same boat. Because while we are floating on the same sea, it is clear that some are in superyachts while others are clinging to drift debris. Inequality defines our time.

The causes of these great inequalities lie not just in differences in income. The opportunities you get in life also depend on your gender, your family's ethnic background, whether you have a disability or not, your religion and other factors. What life becomes and what expectations you have of life depend on the circumstances under which you are born. Big differences in income and social security create unrest in the development of society. Major social inequalities entail greater economic instability, increased corruption, financial crises, more crime and inferior physical and mental health in the population. Millions of people live under discrimination and exploitation and lack of access to justice. Especially for indigenous populations, migrants, refugees and minorities, this is a reality. Such inequality is a direct violation of human rights.

The political structures we live under today do not succeed in supplying important global structures such as public health, sustainable development and peace. To achieve a more equal world, it is time to write a New Social Contract – a New Social Contract that gives young people a life of dignity, ensures that women have the same rights and opportunities as men, and defends the sick, the weak and minorities.

What today divides the world into different parts of knowledge is access to technology and the Internet. A qualitatively good and free education for all is the key to eliminating inequalities. Education should not only include basic knowledge but also offer education in digital technologies. All education should cover lifelong learning, from preschool throughout life. The digital revolution's artificial intelligence is going to change the world in ways that we cannot imagine today. This is why governments must invest in both education and digital infrastructure.

A New Social Contract between governments, citizens, civil society and the business world needs to include an economic system that works for all and is an influence for the citizens. The contract needs to encompass the right to work, sustainable development, and social protection based on equal rights and opportunities for all. A changed world requires a different way of thinking when it comes to social protection and what new safety nets should look like, including universal healthcare and the possibility of a universal basic income. We also need to create programmes that address historical differences such as gender, race and certain social norms. In the New Social Contract, taxes also play a large role; all individuals and organisations need to pay their fair share.

COVID-19 puts the spotlight on the inequalities and the great deficiencies of the global welfare system, but in the shadow of this shining light something is happening that in the long run is more dangerous for democracy and world peace. Under the pretence of taking action to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and of governments taking their responsibility, regulations are introduced that restrict freedom of movement and give the police increased authority to interfere with the population. An advancement or, rather, a restriction of rights is something that the world has seen several times throughout history. The changes tend to become permanent after the situation for which they were implemented has disappeared. What we have learned is that when the authorities slowly shrink people's freedom of movement and democratic rights, an anti-democratic social system is snuck upon the inhabitants.

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