



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

#### Fifty-third session

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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social  
development in the contemporary world**

### **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.

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\* E/CN.5/2015/1.



## Statement

Established more than 86 years ago, the International Council on Social Welfare is one of the oldest international non-governmental organizations dealing with a wide range of social development issues, including the promotion of social justice and human welfare. True to our mandate, and taking advantage of our extensive collective experience, we wholeheartedly support the work of the Commission for Social Development and hope that the fifty-third session will lead to important and practical outcomes that will be essential for strengthening transformative elements in the design and future implementation of social policies at the national level.

Our organization is deeply concerned by the visible weakening in social cohesion in some countries and regions and about the adverse situation of vulnerable social groups and numerous individuals facing inequality, insecurities and multiple deprivations. Deeply entrenched inequalities within and among nations represent enormous challenges for development and for all of us, diminishing the productive potential of people and harming human prospects in a profound way.

That is a systemic issue and must be addressed systematically and in a comprehensive manner by Governments and the international community at large.

Important research completed recently by the United Nations Development Programme, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and other international bodies has clearly demonstrated the importance and detrimental impact of inequalities on economic and social development. Vulnerability to environmental degradation exacerbates existing inequalities. The voices of people with disabilities, frail older persons, women who are excluded, indigenous communities and other social groups who face discrimination and marginalization for various reasons deserve to be heard, and their concerns must be addressed. We strongly support the inclusion of a stand-alone goal on inequalities in the post-2015 development framework. We would like to draw the attention of the Commission to the fact that support for a stand-alone goal on inequalities was reflected in the outcome declaration of the Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development, convened in July 2014 by the International Council on Social Welfare together with our partners the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers.

Strengthening social protection is not only one of the best ways to reduce insecurity and deprivation in the world, but also an effective means to reinvigorate the development agenda and come up with new solutions to a range of old and new social ills. Addressing the issues of inequality and poverty reduction in a comprehensive manner and linking human rights and social security obligations facilitates a cross-cutting approach, moving towards mainstreaming human rights throughout the United Nations system. Our organization consistently and fully supports the recommendation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning national floors of social protection (recommendation No. 202), which was unanimously adopted by ILO members in 2012.

In its recommendation, ILO defines social protection floors as four essential social-security guarantees ensuring a minimum level of income security during

childhood, adult life and old age, as well as access to essential health care for all. It stipulates: “The guarantees should ensure at a minimum that, over the life cycle, all in need have access to essential health care and to basic income security, which together secure effective access to goods and services defined as necessary at the national level”. The issue of social protection floors is thus a key element of a coherent, comprehensive and rights-based social development strategy aimed at protecting women, men and children from risks and vulnerabilities, helping to sustain their well-being throughout the life cycle, combating poverty, reducing inequalities and enhancing the social and economic inclusiveness of societies.

The International Council on Social Welfare has been a strong supporter of the social protection floors initiative of the United Nations since 2009. We have made the promotion of social protection floors the cornerstone of our global strategy. The International Council is a founding member of the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, a group of more than 80 non-governmental and international trade union organizations that plays an increasingly important role in shaping the debate, raising awareness and achieving national consensus on strategies on social protection floors. On the strength of its global political acceptance and legitimacy, the concept of social protection floors should be included in all future national and global development strategies.

Social protection floors are mentioned in the proposal of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (see goal 1, on ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, target 1.3). Other core elements of income and health security guarantees are included in other proposed goals, i.e. those on food security and on access to health care, education, water and sanitation and energy. We still hope that social protection floors will play an even more prominent and more visible role in the final formulation of the goals that will succeed the Millennium Development Goals. Already about a year ago the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors demanded a stand-alone goal on social protection floors.

In that context, we would like to draw the attention of the Commission to the statement and report delivered, on 24 October 2014, to the General Assembly by the new Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. The Special Rapporteur urged Governments to embrace the social protection floors initiative, which aims to guarantee basic income security and access to essential social services for all. The Rapporteur placed particular emphasis on the relevance of the initiative to the post-2015 development agenda and presented the implementation of the right to social protection through the adoption by all States of social protection floors as “by far the most promising human rights-inspired approach to the global elimination of extreme poverty”.

The year 2015 also marks the twentieth anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995. The lessons of the Summit and its impact should be carefully studied, if we wish to enhance the effectiveness of social policy formulation for the post-2015 era. The Summit was instrumental in charting new paths to improving the human condition and putting human beings at the centre of development. The three interrelated core issues of the Summit (poverty eradication, employment promotion and social integration, supported by an enabling environment based on a framework of equity and equality), along with its 10 commitments, exemplify a still valid, inclusive and holistic vision of social development. The norms set out in the outcome documents of the Summit reflected

values and principles of key United Nations documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as a set of agreements achieved at several prior international conferences and summits.

One of the lessons learned in the past 20 years, and clearly applicable in the ongoing elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda, is the need to retain and enhance a comprehensive vision of development as advocated at the Summit, without reducing it exclusively to an economic perspective. Despite its undeniable importance, economic growth is a means to development, not an end in itself. The economic perspective is just one of the perspectives and should be seen in conjunction with political, environmental, ethical and spiritual considerations, while human dignity and equality should never be overlooked. In both economic and social terms, as clearly affirmed in the Copenhagen Declaration, the most productive policies and investments have been those that empower people to maximize their capacities, resources and opportunities. As proven by the experience of many countries, economic growth and human development reinforce each other. The majority of the most efficient and successful economies are still operated for and by the world's most equal, socially secure and inclusive societies.

Social policy can achieve better outcomes when it is conceived and implemented as part of broader national development strategies. While economic tools may be essential for addressing some underlying causes of such social ills as persistent poverty or long-term structural unemployment, a reduction in vulnerability and insecurity, particularly given the new threats associated with climate change and environmental degradation, can occur much faster when economic, social and environmental policies are conceived and implemented in an integrated manner. Moreover, intergenerational equity and the strengthening of economic and social ties between generations are important considerations that should not be overlooked in the emerging social agenda of a rapidly ageing world.

Social issues are, by definition, political issues. The implementation of a social agenda usually involves the redistribution of the national output, and it is inevitable that social policies in a democratic society represent a compromise among various political forces and actors. Establishing and protecting fiscal space for expenditures on social services, including welfare and social protection, should become an indispensable element when national budgets are prepared and the corresponding priorities are established. This also implies that efficiency issues pertinent to social interventions should be a vital part of the picture, while the deployment of the most effective management resources to achieve social ends is always one of the public priorities in the implementation of the national budget.

Finding an integrated way of looking at socioeconomic development, and making development sustainable and equitable, is a challenge, but that challenge needs to be met for the sake of present and future generations. One way of charting out that integrated way is to build a comprehensive set of global governance tools, consisting of development goals that are periodically reviewed and a body of rights-based, legally binding United Nations instruments that codify and specify the non-alienable social rights of global citizens in their national and global economic environment.

One such tool is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in December 2006, which is successfully changing the lives of

many people with disabilities for the better, as it begins to exercise a normative influence on national law and practice. We urge Member States to complete the ongoing consultations on a similar international convention on the rights of older persons and enter into the legal formulation process as expeditiously as possible.

Using the opportunity to engage in the process of “rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”, as proposed by the Commission for Social Development, we call for the elaboration and adoption of a new United Nations social policy instrument, one that would strengthen the impact of ILO recommendation No. 202, providing tangible content to the human right to social security and the right to an adequate standard of living. A comprehensive international instrument on social protection floors, open to ratification by Member States, would enhance the political impact and weight of the concept of social protection floors, provide visibly joint ownership of the concept by the entire United Nations system and ensure its genuine mainstreaming in national and international social policy debates. While such an instrument could take the form of a convention or an optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, it would be of pivotal importance that the instrument be legally binding and that it exercise direct impact on national law. It is hardly possible to overestimate the importance of such an instrument for the 75 per cent of the global population who still lack adequate social security and the 35 per cent among them who still live in abject poverty.

The elaboration and adoption of a pertinent Economic and Social Council resolution would be a logical first step on the road to the new international instrument on social protection floors and a concrete first result of the process of rethinking social development.

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