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Priority Theme: “Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication”

Statement submitted by the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Created almost a century ago, the **International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW)** is one of the oldest international civil society organizations dealing with a wide range of social welfare and social justice issues. Supporting new ideas and progressive policies as a driving force for change, the organization has for many years played a prominent role in intellectual and academic discourse, which provides a foundation for new approaches to social policy challenges both regionally and globally. We proudly note that on many occasions in the recent past the transnational activism of the ICSW has encouraged political leaders to develop and refine new concepts, theories and frameworks that challenge existing paradigms. We recognize that social issues are often complex and multifaceted, involving various stakeholders with differing perspectives and interests. Cooperation with partners is essential as it allows for the pooling of expertise and resources to better understand and address these complexities.

Through the years ICSW has strongly supported the approach to social policies that encompass human rights protections. Ensuring that individuals are free from discrimination, have access to justice, and are treated with dignity is central to a process of development that is humane and people-centered. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted 75 years ago by the United Nations and setting out the basic rights and freedoms that apply to all people, remains a benchmark and a road map for the ICSW in our various activities.

We at the ICSW believe that the Commission for Social Development could play a prominent role in reshaping attitudes, behaviors and norms that could drive social transformations in the context of 2030 Agenda. People-centered policies have the power to drive social and economic transformations by promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities, social justice, and solidarity within a society. They can expand labor market opportunities and address discrimination and social exclusion. One of the key objectives of social policies is the reduction of poverty, which directly enhances the quality of life and opens up newer opportunities for vulnerable populations. With the help of well-crafted social policies, governments can address systemic inequalities, foster a sense of community, and promote collective responsibility. This, we believe, remains an essential condition for achieving the SDGs.

The current world situation is fraught with political instability, social and economic insecurity, geopolitical conflicts, and the climate crisis. Under the emerging and persisting shadow of such global processes, more and more people are being pushed to extreme vulnerability. A global atmosphere that is not conducive to international cooperation and collective action will be detrimental and could cause serious impediments for the realization of the 2030 Agenda. We see peace, justice and enabling political environment as integral to inclusive development.

It is well-known that reducing poverty and human vulnerabilities at the country level requires concerted efforts on the part of various stakeholders within as well as across borders. As widely recognized, international cooperation and diplomacy can facilitate policy coordination and harmonization among countries to address cross-border vulnerabilities. This includes collaborating on numerous burning issues such as climate change, global food security, disaster risk reduction, migration, and health emergencies. By aligning policies and sharing responsibilities, countries can collectively address vulnerabilities that transcend national boundaries.

The coordination of development efforts across various sectors, such as health, education, infrastructure, can help avoid the duplication of efforts, identify synergies, and maximize the impact of interventions. Such an approach recognizes that

sustainable and inclusive development requires addressing multiple dimensions of well-being simultaneously. Our organization believes in “the whole-of-government” approach, which is essential for more effective social policies and more efficient allocation of resources. In this light the ICSW considers development as a holistic process that encompasses economic growth, social progress, environmental sustainability, and effective governance. It recognizes that these dimensions are interdependent and that neglecting one can undermine progress in others.

People-centered social innovation places individuals and communities at the center of problem-solving and decision-making processes. It empowers them to actively participate in shaping the solutions that affect their lives. In the context of the SDGs, this empowers marginalized and vulnerable groups to have a voice and participate in the development process, ensuring that no one is left behind.

We believe that social innovation that is people-centered and considers the specific needs and preferences of the communities it serves, can lead to the development of more tailored and effective solutions, thereby contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. Solutions that are co-created with the affected people are more likely to be sustainable. When individuals and communities are actively engaged in the innovation process, they have a sense of ownership and responsibility for the solutions, making them more committed to their long-term success. This is vital for the sustainability of projects aimed at achieving the SDGs.

We consider a universal basic income (UBI) concept to be a social policy innovation because it represents a novel approach to addressing poverty and income inequality. It may also be seen as a tool in the adaptation to changing labor markets and a way to address potential job displacement and economic insecurity due to automation and shifts in the nature of work. At the same time the ICSW recognizes that the UBI is a subject of significant debate and practical challenges, and more pilot programs are required on the ground to assess the feasibility and impacts of basic income.

As digital technology becomes an integral part of modern life, access to the internet and digital tools has become increasingly essential for various aspects of daily living, including education, employment, healthcare, and participation in civil and social activities. The ICSW wishes to underscore that digital technology has become an important enabling factor for accessing information, communicating, and expressing oneself, thus strengthening capabilities for the exercise of various human rights, such as freedom of expression and access to information.

Yet another important approach of the ICSW is the emphasis on regional cooperation, which we believe plays a crucial role in reducing vulnerabilities by promoting the exchange of experiences and resources among countries facing similar challenges. Developing countries can learn from each other's experiences, share innovative solutions, and provide mutual support in formulating innovative social policies. Platforms for South-South cooperation, such as regional organizations and networks, can facilitate these collaborations.

Guided by the above considerations the ICSW organized in September 2023, in Windhoek, Namibia, a seminar on social policy and social protection in Africa. This event, which was attended by social scientists and practitioners from the region and beyond, became an important platform for discussing innovative social policy approaches in the African context.

The Windhoek Declaration adopted by the participants stressed the role of social policy as a corner stone for nation-building, and human, social and economic development. It reiterated that social protection is not a charity but a human right. The ICSW strongly supports universal social protection, seeing it as part of broader,

developmental, and comprehensive social policy that aims at including access to human rights for all and includes social values in all sector policies.

The Windhoek Declaration called for the full use of cost-effective information and communication technologies in devising and implementing welfare policies, promoting so-called “smart welfare” policies. Public administrations, companies and citizens must respect the digital rights of citizens from a person-centered approach. The ICSW recommends promoting participatory and inclusive digitization processes, and reducing the digital divide. Digital skills training should be a priority for all citizens, and for social welfare professionals.

One of the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic is that our societies must address present and future humanitarian catastrophes. To this end, the ICSW highlights the need for specific training for social welfare professionals, greater coordination between public administrations and the private sector, and increased investment in social protection systems.

Finally, the Declaration strongly supports the convening of the 2025 World Social Summit, as proposed by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. The deterioration in global political, social and economic conditions makes convening such a summit particularly relevant and important.

The ICSW underscores that higher priority should be accorded to the views of the ‘Global South’ and lower- and middle-income countries. Convening the Summit in one of those countries would ensure that “the voice” of this group of countries is better heard.

In summary, the ICSW is convinced that social policy plays a crucial role in shaping the social, economic, and political structures that impact individuals, families, and communities. Social policies have the ability to promote civic engagement, social cohesion, and community participation. Empowering individuals to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives should be seen as a central tenet of human-centered development. Well-designed and properly implemented social policies are a critical tool for governments to address social injustices and foster solidarity.

The ICSW hopes that the deliberations of the Commission for Social Development at its 62nd session will contribute to more effective social policies that help create a more equitable, inclusive, and humane society, where the needs and aspirations of individuals are at the forefront of the development process. By ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities and providing essential services, social policies can create a fairer, more inclusive, and more interconnected society. The ICSW strongly supports the work of the Commission in its efforts to refine the existing approaches to social policy and strengthen its transformative features, which should be well attuned to national circumstances. What we see as crucial in this regard is the political will as well as the determination to overcome the resistance to difficult but necessary change.