

## Statement for the Opening of the Commission for Social Development

Excellencies,

Young people have been called critical agents of change in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And young people around the world are indeed often at the forefront of innovative solutions. But we cannot truly be agents of change without access to the conditions that allow us to bring about this change for the future of our planet.

As a society, we cannot hope to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development without addressing the rights and needs of this, the world's largest generation of young people.

Globally, it is difficult to be sure how many young people are living in poverty. We know that in 2003, nearly 500 million young people aged 15-24 were living on less than \$2 a day. But, 15 years later, those 15-24 year-olds are now 30-39 year-olds, and are no longer considered young in many parts of the world or in most statistics. In strategies for eradicating poverty, it is vital that we understand the importance of data collection, and data disaggregation.

How can we have effective strategies for poverty eradication if we don't know how to target those strategies? Lack of data on the most vulnerable and the most marginalised makes them "invisible". We don't treasure what we don't measure.

What we can be sure about is that young people are among the most affected by austerity measures and cuts in social investment. In OECD countries, children and young adults are 25% more likely to be poor than the population as a whole. These stark facts and figures are evidence of the need for strategies for eradicating poverty that include a youth perspective, and target young people.

However, poverty cannot be tackled through any one measure. Poverty is multidimensional. It follows that strategies and policies targeting poverty require diverse and multi-level responses. This is all the more true for young people, as the transition from childhood to adulthood presents complex and challenging circumstances. We know that if poverty is not tackled early within an individual's life, it can become systemic, not only affecting that individual but also generations to come. Tackling poverty amongst young people requires a holistic perspective and approach. Crucially, the rights of each young person must be at the core.

In recent years, there has been a great deal of attention to the situation of young people in the labour market. Youth unemployment is undeniably an important challenge that requires an urgent and scaled-up response. For a young person who is unemployed, the lack of a job can lead to poverty. For a young person who is already living in poverty, accessing the labour market is all the more difficult.

But policies promoting youth employment are far from enough to address poverty among young people. In-work poverty is a serious concern for young people around the world, from Belize, to Belgium, to Benin. In Sub-Saharan Africa, youth working poverty rates stand at almost 70%.

It is clear that jobs alone are not the answer. Young people need access to jobs of quality, to adequate and fair remuneration and to social protection. And yet, our experience in Europe shows that young people, time and again, face discrimination in securing quality jobs and accessing social protection. We are denied access to our economic and social rights.

Even in countries with universal social protection, young people face social security systems that discriminate against us on the basis of our age or are inadequate for the current realities we face. Young people are expected to be flexible and embrace new forms of work, or to create our own jobs as young entrepreneurs, and yet we do not have access to the protection we need to take on these challenges.

Young people are much more likely to be in precarious, insecure or low-quality work than older workers. It is clear that we need fair, just and updated social protection systems. Age-based discrimination in access to minimum wages, social protection and social security systems must be consigned to history.

In calling for this, it is not my intention to pit different generations against each other. As Christine Lagarde of the International Monetary Fund wrote last week, “building an economy that works for young people creates a stronger foundation for *everyone*”. We must work to build an economy and a society that work for young people if we hope to eradicate poverty.

Young people are systematically underrepresented in the political arena, often being excluded from decisions that affect us, our future or that of future generations. We face discrimination and barriers in accessing our civil and political rights. We face a lack of power.

But if we hope to eradicate poverty, young people must not only be a target group of strategies and actions, but full participants in their development, implementation and evaluation. Young people must be meaningfully engaged in decision-making at all levels and in all circumstances, through dedicated channels for our voices, concerns and realities to be heard by decision-makers.

Young people are more at risk of poverty and social exclusion than other population groups, but not every young person has experienced or will experience poverty in their lifetime. Inequality between and within countries means that the risk and experience of poverty will be different for a young person in Sudan than a young person in Spain for example, for a young woman than for a young man, for a young migrant than for a young person remaining in their country of birth.

To tackle poverty, measures and strategies that target and lift up the young generation as a whole are needed. But measures are also needed to tackle inequality and multiple

discrimination, and to target those young people who are the most vulnerable, the most marginalised and the most left behind.

It is clear that tackling poverty comprehensively cannot be done through a focus only on SDG1. The eradication of poverty will not be achieved by only addressing poverty itself, as a multitude of social, environmental and economic factors can prevent people from escaping poverty or push them back. The 2030 Agenda must be addressed in its entirety if we are to have any hope of eradicating poverty, and it must certainly be addressed in its entirety if we are to have any hope of achieving sustainable development for all.

We must never forget that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an agenda with its basis in human rights, one that commits to leave no one behind. Partnering with young people to ensure that all our rights are fully respected and fulfilled will be absolutely essential to ensure that we are recognised as a resource for change, in the fight against poverty and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

I encourage this Commission to take into account the youth perspective and the rights and needs of this largest generation of young people in your discussions. Let's jointly work to achieve a better outcome and a future free from the tyranny of poverty, for our generation and those to come.

Thank you.