



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

26 April 2013

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to inform you that I will convene an informal thematic debate entitled “Inequality”, to be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on Monday, 8 July 2013.

The debate is being convened according to General Assembly Resolution 67/230 adopted on 17 December 2012, which requests the President of the General Assembly to organize an informal thematic debate to address the issue of inequality. I also have the honour to inform that I am in consultation with the Permanent Mission of Guyana to the United Nations, the leading co-sponsor of the aforementioned resolution.

The financial crisis of 2008 was one of most serious the world has ever experienced weakening the social fabric in both developed and developing countries. The fall-out from the crisis is expected to continue for some time, deepening inequalities in our societies.

Social inequality is not only the product of this crisis. It is due in large part to structural disparities in the distribution of wealth, which contributes to create a lack of access or the difficulty in gaining access to even basic services and justice. A deepening of social inequality may become a source of social and political instability.

To tackle social inequality is a moral duty, a political necessity, and an imperative for the due protection of human rights.

The interactive thematic debate will include an opening session, a high-level morning session as well as an afternoon panel session and closing remarks. Please find herewith a concept paper of the event. A detailed program will be distributed in due course. Updated information about the event will be available on the website of the President of the General Assembly.

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

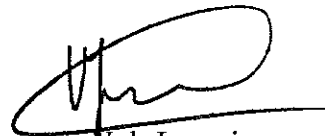
To benefit from the wide range of knowledge and expertise, I invite respective Governments from Member and Observer States to be represented at the highest possible level.

I will also invite representatives of relevant institutions, of non-governmental institutions, of the academia, of private sector and other specialists.

For further details on this event, please contact, Mr. Jorge Tagle, tel. 212-963-3575, e-mail address tagle@un.org

I look forward to an active and dynamic debate.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



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GENERAL ASSEMBLY THEMATIC DEBATE ON

“INEQUALITY”

8 July 2013
United Nations, New York

Concept Note

1. Background

The debate is being convened according to paragraph 22 of Resolution 67/230 titled “The role of the United Nations in promoting a new global human order” of 17 December 2012, which requested the President of the General Assembly to convene “in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, an informal thematic debate in 2013 to address the issue of inequality.” In its paragraph 20 the Resolution “encourages giving appropriate consideration to the need to reduce inequality in the elaboration of the post 2015 development agenda”.

Furthermore, in recognition of the importance of both forging strategic partnerships and arrangements between the United Nations and regional organizations, this thematic debate is being organized in cooperation with the Organization of American States (O.A.S.).

Inequality was one of the central topics of the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. In the Commitment 2 of its Outcome Document, Member States committed themselves to the goal of eradicating poverty from the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind. To that end, at the national and international levels and in partnership with all key stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society organizations and in the context of a multidimensional and integrated approach, they decided to: “f) Seek to reduce inequalities, increase opportunities and access to resources and income, and remove any political, legal, economic and social factors and constraints that foster and sustain inequality.”

Later, paragraph 6 of Resolution 62/213 of 7 March 2008 recognized that “inequality within and among countries is a concern for all countries regardless of their level of development and that it represents a growing challenge with multiple implications for the realization of economic and social potential and the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals”.

In his report titled “The role of the United Nations in promoting a new global human order and an assessment of the implications of inequality for development (doc. A/67/394), the Secretary General points out that income inequality have been growing in many countries throughout the world despite the decline in absolute poverty. The report also points out that rapid rates of economic growth and the continued growth in finance-driven globalization have resulted in poor or inadequate job growth. In many countries, periods of rapid economic growth were characterized as jobless growth.

2. Issues to be addressed

Among all the aspects of inequality, there is no doubt that income and social inequalities are the ones that strike most directly all of us and are the areas in which there is a more urgent need to improve.

Social inequality refers to the existence of unequal opportunities and rewards across socially-defined groups that are often rooted in historical circumstances. Social inequality is usually associated with inequality between and within social groups. Individual-level attributes such as race/ethnicity, age, gender, disability status, citizenship and social class often define one's membership in a particular social group. Rural-urban disparities represent another important source of inequality. Addressing social inequality in all its forms is essential to achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

Empirical studies have shown that inequalities between groups constitute a large component of overall inequalities within countries and that they are more persistent over time than economic inequalities between individuals.¹ In Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, older persons are more likely to live in poverty as compared to the total population. Similarly, indigenous peoples fare much worse than non-indigenous people in every socio-economic dimension. In particular, indigenous women are among the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups in the world, suffering discrimination not only on the basis of gender, but also on the basis of their ethnicity and culture. There are also significant social inequalities between persons with disabilities and the general population in education and health outcomes and access to full and productive employment and decent work opportunities.

Overall, these inequalities influence not only those who belong to disadvantaged groups. The denial of political voice or influence among those who are socially excluded has often been a major driver of social tensions, political instability and violent conflict.

The post-1970s period has been marked by an upsurge in income inequality in nearly all countries. In contrast to rising income inequality within and across countries, inequalities in other important dimensions of well-being have been declining across countries, especially in education following the global expansion of primary schooling.² These improvements reflect intensified efforts by Governments to extend education to women, the poor and other vulnerable groups.

However, inequalities in education, health and other dimensions of wellbeing are often more striking within countries. Across the developing world, children from households in the poorest income quintile are significantly more likely to die in infancy or to be out of primary school than children born to households in the top income bracket.

3. Objectives of the debate

The thematic debate will provide the occasion to discuss the above referred issues and to share experiences of different regions in their approach to reducing social

¹ UNRISD. 2010. Combating Poverty and Inequality. Structural change, social policy and politics. UNRISD: Geneva.

² see: <http://barrolee.com/>

inequalities, not only from the governmental perspective, but also from the views of civil society and private sector. The aim is also to contribute to the ongoing debate about the post-2015 development framework as well as ongoing efforts to define sustainable development goals pursuant to the outcome of the Rio+20 Summit.

4. Format

This one-day debate will include an opening session, a high-level morning session, two consecutive interactive panel sessions in the afternoon as well as closing remarks.

Morning Session

This session will comprise opening statements from the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) and keynote speakers. The opening will be followed by a panel and an interactive dialogue with Member States.

Afternoon Session

There will be a second panel, followed by interactive dialogue with Member States and civil society.

Closing

The President of the General Assembly and the Secretary General of the Organization of America States will make closing remarks.
