

Civil Society Forum
“Reclaiming Copenhagen”
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Madam chair, ladies and gentlemen,

“Reclaiming Copenhagen”: you could not have chosen a better title for this Civil Society Forum. It implies both a sense of loss and of opportunity.

A sense of loss because there is a feeling that what was agreed at Copenhagen some 10 years ago has somehow disappeared in the morass of the plethora of other UN conferences and summits, reports of high-level panels and, last but not least, the Millennium Declaration.

But it also connotes an opportunity, albeit a challenging one. Tomorrow is the start of the 43rd session of the Commission for Social Development where the main task is to understate a review of the further implementation of the Copenhagen Summit. It is at this session that we, governments and civil society will have the opportunity to reclaim the social development agenda from the morass in which it has been slowly fading.

What does this reclaiming entail? Let there be no doubt, the Commission, in carrying out over the years its responsibility for follow-up to the Copenhagen Summit has continued to emphasize the importance of social development as well as its interconnectedness with economic development. Also, without a doubt, this pattern will be repeated in the coming days and even stronger so thanks to the presence of many ministers from developing and developed countries alike.

But does this gathering a few days, including high-level officials from capitals, automatically lead to a reclaiming of Copenhagen? Or is it only going to be a spike which will quickly dissipate once everyone has gone home?

Who is attending this session of the Commission? Ministers of Social Affairs, Social Welfare, Family Affairs, Health, Employment and members of civil society like yourselves all deeply committed to social development. Needless to say, for most who will be present in the coming days, the central message of Copenhagen, that is, “creating a society for all” by means of tackling the three core issues of poverty eradication, promoting full employment and fostering social integration, is not in question. There may be differences of emphasis and of priorities but basically the dialogue will be among the already convinced. In other words, for those present the Copenhagen Summit is the centre-piece for promoting social development.

However, like the saying that “one swallow doesn’t make a summer”, Reclaiming Copenhagen cannot and will not be achieved as long as its pursuit remains within the

confines of the Commission for Social Development. Therefore, the real challenge facing the Commission in the coming days is to have its deliberations and outcome inform, influence and shape not only the development debate in general but especially the September 2005 high-level event on the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration. Here the Millennium Development Goals are of particular relevance.

In this regard, it cannot be overemphasized that the MDGs should be placed in a larger development context as set out by the major conferences of the past decade. Especially the Copenhagen Summit contains much of what is later, at least partially, reflected in the Millennium Declaration.

The Copenhagen Summit stressed the importance of people-centered development, where individuals and social groups are treated as active participants rather than passive recipients. Therefore, among the important issues to be taken up in the Millennium Declaration review should be: overcoming exclusion and promoting inclusive institutions; and promoting participation.

Furthermore, an increased focus in combating international violence has diverted attention, human and financial resources, away from development. Thus, there is a risk that concerns for national security will further marginalize the development agenda both nationally and internationally, especially in times of heightened public alert over security threats. The Millennium Review should keep development issues front and center as they are of the greatest concern to the vast majority of the Member States.

Although the Millennium Declaration and the Copenhagen Summit share common values, principles and programmes of action, the Millennium Declaration's focus on the 1\$/day definition of poverty is a major difference. While it is true that this narrower definition of poverty has helped to raise awareness and has spurred debate by contrasting that amount to daily incomes in developed countries, it differs from the broader definition as set out in the Copenhagen Summit, which characterized poverty not only by lack of income and consumption, but also by lack of participation in society, and relating these to various structural causes in both national and international domains. Moreover, the Millennium Declaration review would benefit if it were to go beyond seeing poverty eradication as only a matter of financial resources; it should also address inequality in income or wealth. Furthermore, the focus should not only be on absolute poverty but should also include relative poverty that is pervasive in rich countries.

The approaches adopted for achieving the MDGs should also pay attention to the context in which the targets are set. The different ways in which poverty is experienced by different social groups cannot be overlooked. Poor people are not a homogenous group, and policies must be developed and targeted to the specific ways in which different groups of poor people experience poverty (for example, older persons, young people, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and migrants). To do this, the Millennium Declaration review should stress that more information is required, primarily disaggregated statistical data, qualitative evidence on poverty and how it affects different

people, and knowledge about the intergenerational transmission of poverty. It is particularly important to recognize the need to disaggregate approaches to achieving the MDGs.

On the issue of employment, the Copenhagen Summit declared that: “Productive work and employment are central elements of development as well as decisive elements of human identity. Sustained economic growth and sustainable development as well as the expansion of productive employment should go hand in hand.” However, the centrality of employment to economic and social development is absent in the Declaration, except in so far as it advocates the development of “decent and productive work for youth”. The issue of employment has suffered from a general disconnect between economic and social policy making, and is now addressed in far more limited terms than those envisioned at the Copenhagen Summit. This situation should be rectified by explicitly bringing employment creation into the picture not in the least because it is an essential ingredient in poverty eradication. In this regard, the Declaration’s commitment on decent and productive work for young people deserves more attention in the General Assembly’s five-year review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.

A similar observation can be made pertaining to social integration. The Copenhagen Summit called for the “protection and full integration into the economy and society” of all groups, yet the fundamental contribution of social integration to both economic and social development has failed to filter through to later policy documents. Aside from the commitment to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, the MDGs make little or no reference to efforts build to more inclusive, participatory, stable, just and democratic societies. The review of the Millennium Declaration should overcome this situation by stressing the connection between socially integrated societies and growing, productive economies – or the notion that social integration builds stability necessary for sustained economic growth.

The implementation of the Copenhagen Summit commitments can contribute to the attainment of the MDGs, as much as the current focus on the MDGs can reinvigorate the commitments made in Copenhagen. Perhaps the best way to Reclaim Copenhagen is to concentrate on the fulfillment of the MDGs while giving special attention to the core issues of the Social Summit that address issues beyond the MDGs, such as in employment, social integration and the structural aspects of poverty. Still, the MDGs promise only to take us halfway there. No matter their galvanizing effect, they are not a substitute for the social development agenda, which is much broader and goes beyond these goals.

To a larger extent it is the task of the forthcoming session of the Commission for Social Development to bring this broader agenda back into the development discourse. The fact that the Commission’s chairman, Ambassador Kumalo, is requested to transmit the outcome of this session through the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly’s review of the Millennium Declaration provides a golden opportunity to reclaim Copenhagen.

Indeed, to quote from your letter of invitation to his Forum, “governments need to recognize that social development is an essential part of the Global Social Contract in our time, as it is the underpinning of human security for all people of our globe”. I couldn’t agree more and it makes the task of “Reclaiming Copenhagen” all the more urgent.

Thank you.