

The Commission for Social Development

Forty-third session, 8 – 18 February 2005

NGO Forum Declaration

We, representatives of civil society, reaffirm our commitment to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development (1995). We support the initiatives for social development adopted by the General Assembly at its 24th Special Session (2000).

We believe the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action are fundamental to social development throughout the world. We reaffirm our commitment to the four core areas of the World Summit, namely, the elimination of poverty, employment, social integration, and an environment that enables social development for all.

As representatives of civil society we acknowledge the contribution of the Commission to furthering social development. Yet, we believe that governments of the world by and large have neglected the commitments made ten years ago.

Accordingly, we, as civil society, renew our own commitment to keep alive the Declaration and Programme of Action. We cannot leave it to governments alone. Rather, we will take an active role in persuading governments that lasting security is built on investment and assurance of human rights, equitable access to the basic necessities of life – food, health care, shelter, education, employment, water, sanitation -- social protection and citizen participation in development. It is shameful that in this age of extraordinary wealth and rapid technological progress 1.2 billion people live in extreme and chronic poverty, when measured by economics alone. We urge attention to human dignity, human security for all and development for every citizen across the life course.

The implementation of the Copenhagen Commitments requires:

- Political will sustained through open partnerships between civil society and government
- Placing people and human rights at the centre of development
- Equitable investment in social and economic development
- Ensuring inclusion and participation of all those affected by government policy

This necessitates changing the way we think and act; altering familiar patterns of planning and decision-making.

Political will sustained through open partnerships between civil society and government.

All international human rights agreements, all declarations, treaties, documents and resolutions must be subject to monitoring, review and reporting to civil society and government. This action requires accountability, transparency and responsiveness to the diversity of communities and the unique requirements of vulnerable populations. Empowerment and education of all citizens demands political power to be shared and requires new formulae for inclusion of civil society in political processes with appropriate and targeted resources.

Placing people and human rights at the centre of development

Placing people and human rights at the centre of development requires that every economic and social policy be designed to enhance human well-being. It requires that government honour diversity and differences of gender, ethnicity, culture, origin and ability.

Human rights apply equally and indivisibly to all people across the life course. If the promise of Copenhagen is to be realized, affirmative action needs to be taken to ensure the rights and meet the needs of the chronically poor, the disenfranchised and the socially excluded. Poverty amongst the already poor and disenfranchised is escalating, as is the experience of social and economic injustice. If this is to change, economic, political and social structures that sustain poverty and unjust relations must be transformed, and the extremes of poverty and wealth throughout the world rebalanced.

Equitable investment in social and economic development

While governments respond to crises with immediate financial assistance, often little consideration is given to integration of economic and social development policies which will serve the long-term. The harmonising of social needs with economic policy-making is an urgent requirement. Economic policies must take account of the human realities of poverty, unemployment and human dignity. All governments, international organisations and civil society must work together to integrate social and economic policies that foster measurable, sustainable social advancement.

Ensuring inclusion and participation of all those affected by government policy

Discrimination against persons of any age or condition is unacceptable. This exclusion is doubly acute for those who live in conditions of poverty and are denied access to education, economic stability and political participation. Among the most vulnerable of these are the elderly, children, especially girl-children, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, migrants. Are we to wait until these members of the global society achieve economic success before allowing them to join the human conversation? The same question can be posed in relation to poor countries that are excluded from negotiation of international financial and trade agreements that are, in effect, imposed upon them.

Urgency for Action

The increase of preventable communicable diseases and infant death; the spread of HIV/AIDS and chronic poverty in old age continues to shame the world. The goal of Copenhagen to reach the "highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the access of all to primary healthcare" is far from realized. In a world where so many receive quality education and have access to technology the failure to provide universal basic education to all is unacceptable. One-third of the world's work force does not have decent nor stable work and three-quarters of the world's older population does not have social protection in old age. This is simply unacceptable.

We reaffirm our commitment to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and urge governments to apply its principles with new urgency.

We call on governments to abandon empty words and forego grand documents. We ask simply that you implement agreements already made.

We urge you to recall the holistic vision of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action as you prepare for the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration.

Social development is the underpinning of human security for all people of our globe. In this it is an essential part of a needed Global Social Contract. We want the Heads of State to recognize this fact when they meet in September for the High Level review of the implementation of the Millennium Summit.

A Global Social Contract grounding security-for-all in a commitment to social development-for-all points beyond the Millennium Development Goals to the full realization of the promises that Copenhagen gave to the impoverished peoples of the world. In this project, let us partner together for the betterment of all the peoples of our world. They are counting on us.

We members of civil society in reclaiming Copenhagen renew our commitment to this complex, creative and essentially human project of social development.

Civil Society Forum
7th February 2005
UN Headquarters