

16 November 2004

**Modalities and Background Notes for the High-Level Round Tables of the
Forty-Third Session of the Commission for Social Development**

A. Background

1. In its resolution 2004/58, the Economic and Social Council decided that the forty-third session of the Commission for Social Development should convene high-level plenary meetings open to the participation of all United Nations Member States and Observers, on the 10-year review of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly. The resolution further requests that the Chairman of the forty-third session of the Commission transmit its outcome, through the Economic and Social Council, to the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, including to the high-level event of the General Assembly on the review of the Millennium Declaration in 2005.

2. In this connection, the Bureau of the Commission for Social Development decided to hold three thematic high-level round tables in the framework of the 10-year review on the three core issues of the Copenhagen Summit: eradication of poverty, promoting full employment, and fostering social integration. The purpose of the round tables is to review what has been achieved since the Summit in 1995, to identify further constraints and challenges in these key areas, and to forge an implementation strategy. Linkages to the implementation of the ten commitments adopted by the Social Summit and the Millennium Development Goals will also be examined.

B. Participants

3. The round tables will be comprised of the high-level representatives of Governments attending the high-level segment of the forty-third session of the Commission, including members as well as observers of the Commission for Social Development, United Nations system organizations, NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, and other relevant stakeholders. It is anticipated that approximately 50 persons will participate in each round table.

C. Format

4. The format of the high-level round tables is a multi-stakeholder dialogue among representatives who have indicated a strong and broadly-shared desire to deepen the understanding of the core thematic issues. Participants will be invited to ask questions, make comments and observations and respond to previous speakers, rather than make prepared statements so that an interactive and free-flowing exchange can take place. A Chairperson who will be a high-level representative of a Member State will preside over

each round table. In addition to the Chairperson, there will be a Moderator who will guide the substantive discussions in each round table.

D. Date and Venue

5. The three round tables will take place simultaneously in the morning of Thursday, 10 February 2005, from approximately 10 am to 1:00 pm, immediately following the adjournment of the opening of the high level segment of the Commission. Interpretation will be provided for each round table session. The rooms will be announced at a later stage.

E. Outcome

6. The Chairperson of each round table will present a summary of the discussions to the high-level plenary session of the Commission on Friday 11 February. The three summaries will be included in the final Report of the Commission.

F. Themes

7. The themes for the high level round tables – eradication of poverty, promoting full employment and fostering social integration – are proposed in order to facilitate discussions on how, or if, these three core issues of Copenhagen have advanced over the past ten years, taking into account the Millennium Development Goals. Background notes on the three round tables are attached.

ROUND TABLE ON ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Background note

While the Copenhagen Declaration adopted by the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 contains ten inter-related commitments, the three core issues for which the Summit was convened were eradication of poverty, promoting full employment, and fostering social integration. This roundtable is devoted to the issue of eradication of poverty.

Commitment 2 of the Copenhagen Declaration states: *“We commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.”*

The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action emphasized eradication of poverty through decisive national actions and international cooperation as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind. Governments committed themselves to formulate national policies and strategies to substantially reduce overall poverty, and with specific time-bound goals to eradicate absolute poverty by a target date. This commitment also includes the call to focus efforts and policies to address the root causes of poverty and to provide for the basic needs of all, to increase opportunities and access to resources and income, reduce inequalities, and remove the constraints that engender them, and ensure that poor people participate in decision-making on a policy and regulatory environment that would enable them to benefit from expanding employment and economic opportunities.

The 24th Special Session of the General Assembly, convened to review the implementation of the outcome of the Social Summit, called for putting poverty eradication at the centre of economic and social development and building consensus with all relevant actors on policies and strategies to reduce by one half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by the year 2015. Focus was placed on integrating policies at all levels, including economic and fiscal policies, capacity and institution building, and giving priority to investments in education and health, social protection and basic social services. It also encouraged Governments to develop and implement pro-poor sustainable growth policies that enhance the potential and ability of people living in poverty to improve their lives.

The commitment to eradicate poverty adopted at the Social Summit was adopted by the Millennium Declaration, which resolved to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. This poverty reduction target adopted by the Millennium Declaration set the poverty line at US\$1 a day.

Since the Social Summit, Governments have given increased priority to poverty reduction through setting national poverty reduction targets and formulating and

implementing poverty eradication plans and strategies. Anti-poverty plans have focused on increased access to basic social services including health and education, especially for vulnerable groups, promotion of employment opportunities, provision of social protection, and addressing adverse effects of financial crises.

Yet, despite these efforts, progress has been uneven. At the global level, in terms of the MDG poverty line of \$1 a day, the incidence of poverty dropped, from around 30 per cent in 1990 to 21 per cent in 2001. The largest reduction in poverty took place in China, where the proportion of poor people fell from 33 to 18 per cent of the population. More recently, the transition economies of Eastern Europe and Central Asia have made a marked recovery, reversing the increase in poverty during the 1990s. Although most of Asia and North Africa remain broadly on track for meeting the MDG on poverty, there has been little or no progress in sub-Saharan African and in Latin America and the Caribbean; and in western Asia poverty has actually increased. At the same time, overall, inequalities have increased in all regions and there is little evidence that the root causes of poverty have been addressed adequately.

There are many factors that contribute to the mixed results for poverty reduction, and many countries continue to face deep-seated obstacles and challenges for poverty reduction and eradication. Social, political and other factors impeding efforts in this area include, but are certainly not limited to, social exclusion and discrimination and the resultant lack of opportunities and political power, as well as the denial or lack of enforcement of legal rights; lack of access to basic education and health services; armed conflict; disease, especially HIV/AIDS; poor governance; the burden of geography, particularly for small and land-locked countries; and rapid population growth. Among the many economic factors that are obstacles to, or undermine, poverty reduction are low or unevenly distributed economic growth, high unemployment, heavy external debt, trade system barriers, high levels of income inequality and commodity dependency. In addition, this state of affairs is compounded by a lack of coherence between national and international policies, and an inadequate international enabling environment that works to the disadvantage of developing countries.

In the context of socio-economic policy-making, other major factors influencing poverty include the interrelationships between poverty and economic growth, inequality and trade liberalization. While there is general agreement that sustained economic growth is desirable and necessary for long-term, sustainable poverty eradication, it is also argued that this growth should be broad and inclusive, rather than localized within a geographic and/or sectoral enclave if it is to be effective in poverty reduction. High growth rates alone do not guarantee poverty reduction unless it substantially increases average household income and consumption.

The persistence of high levels of income inequality and its further rise in many countries have made it much more difficult to reduce poverty through growth. The evidence suggests that the higher the level of income inequality, the less impact economic growth has in reducing poverty for any rate of growth. While higher growth rates are likely to improve poverty reduction prospects in both high- and low-inequality countries,

the high-inequality countries need to grow significantly - and often unrealistically - faster to achieve the same amount of poverty reduction.

At the heart of the current debate on poverty eradication, the comprehensive and people-centred approach to development as advanced by the Summit has been severely weakened in the international policy-making arena. While poverty has taken its rightful place of prominence, the comprehensive socioeconomic understanding of poverty promoted by the Summit stands in contrast to the narrower concept and measurement currently used. While this narrower definition of poverty has helped to raise awareness and spurred debate, it differs from the broader definition set out in the Summit, which characterized poverty not only by a 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.

This roundtable will discuss how the commitment to poverty eradication has been addressed in the ten years since the Social Summit. In this discussion, the roundtable may also wish to explore how this commitment is related to the other nine commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration. It will also provide an opportunity to discuss progress, as well as regress, in the fight against poverty in the various regions, including gaps in current policy approaches and inter-linkages with other issues such as, *inter alia*, trade, finance, conflict and HIV/AIDS. The roundtable may wish to address the following questions:

- To what extent have the root causes of poverty been addressed? What are the merits and disadvantages of policies targeted at the poor as compared to overall policies aiming at growth and equity? What is the relationship between the observed increase in inequality within most countries and the mixed record regarding reduction of poverty?
- To what extent has the comprehensive approach to poverty outlined by the Social Summit been reflected in national policies? This approach includes in particular lack of income and productive resources, lack of access to education and other basic services, and lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life. Has this multi-dimensional perspective on poverty been affected by the \$1 a day yardstick adopted by the Millennium Declaration?
- Has the international economic environment been conducive to social development, notably the reduction of poverty? What measures could be taken to improve the coherence of international policies and arrangements in order that they could be more conducive to the reduction

ROUND TABLE ON PROMOTING FULL EMPLOYMENT

Background note

While the Copenhagen Declaration adopted by the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 contains ten inter-related commitments, the three core issues for which the Summit was convened were eradication of poverty, promoting full employment, and fostering social integration. This roundtable is devoted to the issue of promoting full employment.

Commitment 3 of the Copenhagen Declaration states: *“We commit ourselves to promoting the goal of full employment as a basic priority of our economic and social policies, and to enabling all men and women to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods through freely chosen productive employment and work.”*

Ten years ago, world leaders came together in Copenhagen for the first ever United Nations World Summit for Social Development, a meeting which raised hopes and expectations and made actual commitments for the improvement of the human condition. On the issue of *employment*, the Summit document 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.”¹ Macroeconomic policies were considered key to enlarge employment opportunities, promote labour mobility and enhance access by women to traditionally male-dominated occupations. Specific actions envisaged to enhance employment opportunities for groups with specific needs were also seen as necessary to the design of policies and programmes.

This approach was reaffirmed at the 24th Session of the General Assembly, held in Geneva in June 2000, which reviewed the implementation of the commitments adopted in Copenhagen. The special session recognized the need to elaborate a coherent and coordinated international strategy on employment to increase opportunities for people to achieve sustainable livelihoods and gain access to employment. The all-encompassing view of employment has also been reiterated by the International Labour Organization, most recently in its 2004 report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization.²

Although this comprehensive vision may remain as a guiding force for policymaking in the social development sphere, it is nonetheless clear that in the years since the Social Summit, a narrower concept has gradually come about. The centrality of employment to economic and social development was not mentioned in the Millennium Declaration, except for the resolve by the General Assembly “to develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work”. Although the promotion of youth employment is certainly a fundamental

¹ World Summit for Social Development, 6-12 March 1995, United Nations, Part II: Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, para 42.

² ILO World Commission on the social Dimension of Globalization: “A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All”, Geneva, February 2004.

objective, it is not a substitute for the more overarching goals of expanding productive employment and reducing unemployment for all sectors of society.

Actual progress in reaching the goal of full employment advocated by the Copenhagen Summit has also fallen far short of expectations. Rather than making strides towards the attainment of productive employment and work for all, the past ten years have witnessed a rise in unemployment levels. An unprecedented 186 million people were unemployed in 2003, accounting for 6.2 percent of the working population, up from 140 million a decade earlier. In addition, 550 million people fell among the ranks of the working poor. Where job growth has taken place, it has been disproportionately concentrated in insecure, informal forms of employment with low wages and few benefits.

Although the overall picture is negative, employment trends have shown considerable variation across regions and social groups. Among developed countries as a whole, unemployment rates declined by 1.2 percentage points over the decade, in contrast to much of the developing world which experienced rising unemployment rates, ranging from an increase of 0.9 percentage points in East Asia, to 2.1 percentage points in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2.4 percentage points in South-East Asia and 2.9 percentage points for the Economies in Transition of Central and Eastern Europe. On a more positive note, unemployment rates held steady in South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa over the decade, while even declining by 0.2 percentage points in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Of all age groups, the increase in unemployment rates was most pronounced for youth aged 15 to 24. World youth unemployment jumped from 10 per cent, or 70 million young people in 1995, to 14.4 per cent, or over 88 million youth by 2003. Although youth comprise just 25 per cent of the working age population between 15 and 64 years, they account for nearly 47 per cent of the 186 million people unemployed worldwide. As a consequence, youth unemployment is typically two to three times higher than for others. Young women are especially at risk, as they experience unemployment rates 20 to 50 percent higher than that of young men.

The factors that shape these discouraging trends in employment vary across regions and economic groupings. Those that appear to stand out include: globalization; competitive pressures; and national policy decisions. Globalization and the integration of economies have had major impacts on employment. As the ILO described recently, jobs, incomes, security and the rights of workers are heavily affected by such things as patterns of international investment, the growth of trade and the cross-border movement of workers.³ On the other hand, the drive to become ever more competitive in the international economy has created pressure among companies to contain labour costs, with the resultant action engendering feelings of insecurity and instability among workers worldwide. It is also important to recognize the impact of national policies and programmes. Given the level of job changes and dislocations inherent in today's dynamic

³ ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, "A Fair Globalization: Creating opportunities for all", ILO 2004, p. 110.

labour market, active labour market policies are essential to foster the smooth reallocation of labour from declining industries into new and emerging ones. Yet national policies are often not in place to facilitate job search assistance, training and skills upgrading to help dislocated workers' transition into new jobs. In addition, without sufficient investment in education and training, countries cannot be assured of a skilled, adaptable workforce prepared to compete in a knowledge-based economy.

This roundtable will consider how the commitment to full employment has been dealt with in the ten years since the Social Summit. In this discussion, the roundtable may also wish to explore how this commitment is related to the other nine commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration. The roundtable may wish to address the following questions:

- Has there been any progress since the Social Summit in designing specific measures to place the goal of full employment at the centre of macroeconomic policy?
- What policy proposals have been implemented to rectify the imbalance between the pace of globalization and the regulatory framework prevailing today, at the national and international levels? Have specific mechanisms been introduced to allow flexibility in national macroeconomic policies to counter the negative impacts of globalization? This may entail, for example, the promotion of counter-cyclical fiscal policies to expand employment and to reduce poverty during economic downturns, particularly in view of the constraints due to competitive pressures brought about by international trade.
- Have proposals been introduced regarding local content requirements to foreign direct investment that may best promote linkages with job creation? This should include an assessment of the desirability and feasibility of defining a global minimum standard for social protection that could assist in stabilizing incomes, distributing the gains of globalization for the benefit of all and supporting the development of new capabilities. In other words, would a minimum standard effectively prevent the "race to the bottom" whereby countries are forced to overlook or reduce social rules and regulations, including those with direct impact on employment, in order to remain competitive in the international market.

ROUND TABLE ON FOSTERING SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Background note

While the Copenhagen Declaration adopted by the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 contains ten inter-related commitments, the three core issues for which the Summit was convened were eradication of poverty, promoting full employment, and fostering social integration. This roundtable is devoted to the issue of fostering social integration.

Commitment 4 of the Copenhagen Declaration states: *“We commit ourselves to promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.”*

The Programme of Action further stated that “the aim of social integration is to create ‘a society for all’, in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play.” The message of Copenhagen is that social policies should promote more flexible and tolerant societies that embrace all people. Every social group and each individual are equally valuable, and each has a right to contribute to the quest for humane, stable, safe, tolerant and just societies.

In this context, the Programme of Action called for creating transparent and accountable public institutions and mechanisms that are accessible to people and are responsive to their needs; ensuring opportunities for all people to participate in all spheres of public life; strengthening participation and involvement of civil society in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions; providing objective data to enable people to make informed decisions; maintaining social stability and promoting social justice and progress; promoting non-discrimination, tolerance and mutual respect, and the value of diversity; promoting equity and equality of opportunity and social mobility, as well as gender equality and equity and empowerment of women; and eliminating physical and social barriers with the aim of creating a society accessible for all, with special emphasis on measures to meet the needs and interests of those who face obstacles in participating fully in society.

In the Political Declaration adopted by the 24th special session of the General Assembly (Geneva, June 2000), convened to mark the five-year review of the Social Summit, Governments reiterated their resolve “to reinforce solidarity with people living in poverty and dedicate [themselves] to strengthening policies and programmes to create inclusive, cohesive societies for all – women and men, children, young and older persons – particularly those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized.” The special session further recognized that social integration is a prerequisite for creating harmonious, peaceful and inclusive societies. It reiterated that promotion and protection

of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, promotion of a culture of peace, tolerance and non-violence, respect for cultural and religious diversity, elimination of all forms of discrimination, assurance of equal opportunities for access to productive resources and participatory governance are important for social integration. Lack of access to education, the persistence of poverty and unemployment, and inequitable access to opportunities and resources could cause social exclusion and marginalization. Poverty is at least in part the result of inequitable distribution of opportunities, resources, incomes and access to employment and to social services. It further recognized that, in many countries, there is a growing gap between people in high-quality, well-paid employment and those in poorly paid, insecure jobs with low levels of social protection. Owing to continued discrimination and exclusion, women and girls face particular disadvantages.

In summary, the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, and the outcome document of the 24th special session of the General Assembly recognized the obstacles to integrated societies and global social justice and harmony. Discriminatory practices, social polarization and fragmentation, widening disparities and inequalities of income of wealth within and among nations, violence in all its forms were listed among many that present fundamental threats to societies and the global social order.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted in September 2000, while not mentioning specifically the need for social integration and inclusive societies, stated that the values of freedom, equality, solidarity and tolerance were essential to international relations in the 21st century.

This roundtable will consider how the commitment to social integration has been addressed in the ten years since the Social Summit. In this discussion, the roundtable may also wish to explore how this commitment is related to the other nine commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration. It will also explore the linkages between global influences and social integration and social exclusion. The roundtable may wish to address the following questions:

- How has the commitment to promote “a society for all” been interpreted and implemented in international and national policy contexts? Is there greater or lesser concern for achieving equality, equity and social justice and how are these defined in policy debates? What is the current understanding of the notion of participation? Have the concerns of specific social groups, including older persons, persons with disabilities, youth, migrants and indigenous people, been recognized and addressed in policies?
- Have global forces facilitated or hampered progress towards integrated societies and the building of a fair and just global social order? In particular, how have global market forces affected the integration of social and economic objectives and policies at national and international levels, and what have been their effects on equity and equality within and among nations? Is there evidence of increasing global social integration or disintegration?