

**Statement by**  
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**TO THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM**  
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Thank you for inviting me to speak at this Civil Society Forum, convened on the eve of the forty-fifth session of the Commission for Social Development. Like the Commission, the Forum will address the challenge of employment, but from the particular perspective of partnership and innovation.

I like very much the way you have framed the question: “Employment Working for All: Partners in Innovation”. Let me say a few words about the context in which this debate on employment is taking place. I will then turn to a concept that I think could enrich your discussion: the concept of solidarity.

Over the past decade, employment has been recognized by the world community as a global priority.

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development placed the goal of full and productive employment at the forefront of the United Nations Development Agenda. In Copenhagen, Governments committed to promoting full employment as a basic priority of their economic and social policies.

At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders agreed once more to make employment and decent work for all a central objective of international policies, as well as of national development strategies. This was meant as a key part of the broader effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, especially the goal to cut extreme poverty and hunger in half by 2015.

In June 2006, the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council focused on how best to attain full and productive employment and decent work. The resulting Ministerial Declaration underscored that employment generation should constitute a fundamental component of any development strategy. And it set out concrete steps to implement the 2005 Summit objective.

Following this lead, the Commission for Social Development will concentrate on this critical challenge over the next two years.

Given the centrality that this issue has acquired in the UN agenda, our Department of Economic and Social Affairs has chosen full employment and decent work as the theme for this year’s *Report on the World Social Situation*, which we will present to the General Assembly this fall.

The ILO released, two weeks ago, its “Global Employment Trends Brief 2007”, which shows that, despite strong global economic growth, the number of people unemployed worldwide remained at an historic high of 195.2 million last year. It also showed that, although the percentage of working poor in total employment declined during the past decade, the number of working poor living on less than \$2 a day has continued to grow in absolute numbers, reaching 1.4 billion in 2006.

The experience of recent decades, particularly in the developing world, indicates that it is essential to create decent and productive jobs – not just any jobs. Indeed, reducing unemployment and working poverty through generation of such jobs is imperative for future development and economic growth.

As with other global challenges, achieving full employment and decent work for all will require the strengthening of **partnerships** between the United Nations, governments, the private sector, civil society, and academia. Civil society in particular has done much to draw world attention to the development goals agreed at the UN global Conferences and Summits, including the Millennium Development Goals. Indeed, we, at the United Nations see civil society as an active player and an essential partner in the fight to achieve the UN development goals.

It is in this context for action that I want to raise with you the concept of **solidarity**. Today, in a world increasingly pushed towards individualism and market-based economy, solidarity is a sign of hope, especially for marginalized groups and people living in poverty and deprivation. Solidarity has played a critical role in reducing poverty in many developing countries, and has yielded remarkable results at the national and international levels.

The Millennium Declaration and the outcome of the 2005 World Summit both emphasized the value of partnership and solidarity in helping to reach the MDGs, and not least to eradicate poverty. The UN Development Agenda, emerging from the UN conferences and summits, is itself a vivid manifestation of solidarity. It gives voice and specific content to the collective aspirations, goals, and values of all stakeholders to confront common development challenges.

Yet, the persistence of economic and social inequalities at the international and national levels impedes the realization of this Agenda. According to research undertaken by UNU-WIDER, 48 out of 73 countries for which such information is available experienced a deterioration of income distribution during the last three decades, and most of them in a substantial way. The upshot is that approximately nine out of ten citizens in the world live in countries where the income distribution has deteriorated. Let me repeat that, nine out of ten. Rising inequality has truly become a global pandemic. And it is undercutting efforts to secure human rights and fundamental freedoms for all—civil and political rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights.

Disparities at the international level reflect the unequal access of different countries to technology, markets, and finance, as well as the marginalization of

developing countries in key decision-making processes. In this regard, development aid, and efforts to put an end to poverty and make globalization a positive force for all, especially for poor developing countries, are concrete forms of global solidarity. And some promising initiatives on innovative development financing are emerging as new forms of international solidarity.

National policies in the area of social protection represent a collective intervention of society to prevent risks and vulnerabilities, and are one of the most important applications of the principle of solidarity. Significant efforts are needed to develop integrated economic and social policies that aim at preventing economic crises and creating permanent social protection systems. These systems should provide universal coverage based on solidarity principles, and cover basic risks, especially nutrition, health, ageing, and unemployment.

This brings me to the related concept of **the solidarity economy or social economy**. Global initiatives and national policies need to support economic solidarity, a dimension of solidarity evident in activities undertaken by societies and groups to address social, economic, or environmental challenges inadequately met by markets or, indeed, by governments. Consider, for example, the activities of cooperatives, mutual societies, voluntary and civil society organizations, foundations and associations, which conduct business in pursuit of social, environmental and community goals.

These entities are often called “social enterprises” and offer a solidarity-based model of organization to help their members achieve their socio-economic goals, through the creation of employment, provision of financial services, and promotion of social integration. The growing “care economy”—covering such areas as childcare, care for the elderly, education, health, and pensions—seeks to reckon with some of the most challenging social dimensions facing the world today.

These organizations also empower community members and encourage social change through responsible citizenship that exercises control over production, consumption, savings, investment, and exchange. The growing scope of “fair trade” on the global scene is an example of economic solidarity in which profit is not the sole objective of the business entity. “Fair trade” emphasizes equity in international transactions, where traders—some private businesses but many NGOs— and consumers engage in environmentally sustainable practices; are open to public accountability; provide healthy and safe working conditions for their employees; and respect international environmental and labour standards. In 2006, over 1.5 million disadvantaged producers worldwide were directly benefiting from fair trade, while an additional 5 million benefited from fair trade funded infrastructure and community development projects.

In sum, the social economy can serve as an emerging model for managing economic and social development because it integrates social, economic, cultural, and environmental considerations at the community-level, promotes self-help, and contributes to empowerment of people—and particularly marginalized groups, often excluded from

the benefits of the global economy. This is why I am convinced that the solidarity economy and the principle of solidarity at its root can provide powerful frames for your consideration today of how, through partnership and innovation, to make employment work for us all.

I want to thank the NGO Committee on Social Development and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation for organizing this important event. I wish you all a most productive Forum, and I look forward to the presentation on its outcome tomorrow at the Commission for Social Development.