Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical strategies to promote social integration
13 February 2008, Conference Room B

The panel discussion on "Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical strategies to promote social integration" was organized by the Division for Social Policy and Development/DESA in cooperation with the Government of Finland, the Offices of UNESCO and UN-HABITAT in New York.

The panelists included Mr. Ronald Wiman, Senior Social Development Advisor, Department for Development Policy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Ms. Hélène-Marie Gosselin, Representative to the United Nations and Director of the New York office of UNESCO, Ms. Axumite Gebre-Egziabher, Director of the New York office of UN-HABITAT, Ms. Gay Rosenblum-Kumar, Governance and Public Administration Branch/UN DESA, and was chaired by Mr. Sergei Zelenev, Chief of the Social Integration Branch/UNDESA.

At the opening of the discussion the Chair welcomed the opportunity to join forces in exploring social integration, one of the core themes of the Copenhagen Summit. **Mr. Zelenev** noted that the panel discussion provided a timely opportunity to discuss the meaning of social integration and social inclusion, particularly as it will be the priority theme of the 47th session of the Commission for Social Development in 2009 and 2010, for example, if priorities should be on formulating inclusive policies (targeted approach) or make all policies inclusive (mainstreaming approach) or both. The Chair invited the panelists to come up with key points and define policy priorities in this complex area. He also raised the issue of political will, and encouraged the panelists to discuss how support for action on social integration and inclusion can be built.

Mr. Ronald Wiman began by discussing the conceptual developments of Social Integration since the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995. He pointed out that the Copenhagen Summit had a very broad agenda with a systematic approach to increasing the well-being of all people, and since then, the way social integration is understood has changed somewhat from the way it was represented in the Declaration. He mentioned that the goal of a "society for all" is one where every individual has rights and responsibilities and an active role to play. He drew attention to the distinction between integration and inclusion using an example from the disability field, stating that being integrated means you are integrated on somebody else's conditions and when there is inclusion, the environment will change.

Mr. Wiman also spoke of inclusion in terms of development which currently faces the challenge of bringing in those who have previously been excluded and enabling them to become a part of society. He referred to Amartya Sen's "Development as freedom" where the discussion has been trying to define social development as equal opportunity for all, not only in terms of benefits, but also to opportunity to contribute and participate and become a stakeholder in the development process.

Mr. Wiman drew attention to the World Bank's frameworks which contain key concepts relevant for future discussion, such as security, opportunity, inclusion and empowerment. He noted that it was at the Arusha Conference of 2005 that the World Bank opened up the concept of social development beyond the traditional understanding of the social sector and defined it as a transformation of institutions which leads to the empowerment of people. It was said that all people must have access to society, justice, markets and infrastructure and that institutions must work for all.

Working from this perspective Mr. Wiman suggested one way to open up the meaning of social development would be to articulate the concept behind the Copenhagen commitment and widely disseminate a new language which states to state that the goal of social integration is to create a society for all, where all can participate in and benefit from development. He noted that this implies that social institutions function adequately, that the public and private sector carry those responsibilities and all have equal access to basic services and security.

Using examples from Finnish history, Mr. Wiman went on to discuss how the country's policies have been used as a vehicle and instrument for social integration, social inclusion and cohesion. He mentioned the corrective measures taken after the civil war in Finland in the late 19th century. These included land reform as well as universal schooling which proved to be one of the most effective methods to unite the country. Also noted was Finland's participation in the sustainable development discussion at the end of 1990s where it was proposed that sustainability be looked at from a human perspective. He observed that social integration was made a very central element in the social dimension of sustainable development. Another example of inclusive policy offered was the right given to the Swedish speaking minority to use their own language.

Mr. Wiman emphasized that the State had a very active role in integrating society and developing the social dimension after the war. The State acted as a social broker between labourers, employers and the agrarian part of society. Social services were created, such as mother and baby clinics, and social security was provided in the form of social pensions for the self-employed farming population and earnings-related pensions for workers. The provision of basic education for all citizens created opportunities between the classes and a venue for social mobility and cultural integration. Mr. Wiman went on to note that the State served as a banker in the sense that it restricted consumption and provided investment capital for industrialization, and it also supported civil society organizations with the provision of grants and subcontracting to produce social and health services.

Mr. Wiman spoke of the strong commitment of the European Union to the strategic goal of social cohesion and an inclusive society for the future of a widened Europe. He stated that it was recognized that social inclusion is integral to improve the quality of human life and fulfill the potential of every individual as well as societies as a whole. Furthermore, because poverty and exclusion are such multi-dimensional issues, innovative, far-reaching comprehensive strategies that involve all stakeholders are called for and key concepts to be observed are protection, opportunity and empowerment.

Mr. Wiman stressed that Finland, like the EU, aimed to promote social cohesion, provide comprehensive social protection and services combined with economic, employment, social and educational policies. He stated that the Government recognized the people's right to play an active role in society, and that inclusion must be actively promoted, although this could sometimes mean conditionality in social welfare benefits.

For the future, he explained the importance of breaking the vicious cycle of exclusion and disrupt the process which leads to the transmission of poverty from generation to generation. He noted that key measures should be preventive and there should be early intervention with both social problems and corrective services. On a separate note, Mr. Wiman did express concern with the issue of population ageing and that in the future, resources may be inadequate to meet all of the needs of all people.

In concluding, Mr. Wiman drew attention to the experience and progress of the welfare state in eradicating poverty until the end of 1980. He argued that from that point on, the experimentation with policies has resulted in a rise in poverty. He emphasized that comprehensive social policy approaches are needed as a central instrument to develop stable societies that are productive, innovative and safe places to live.

In opening, **Hélène Marie Gosselin** noted the evolving and rich partnership with UNDESA and other members of the UN System such as UN-HABITAT, and that member states were increasingly acting in a more integrated coherent way. She cited the recent coordinated efforts to produce regional and expert group meetings as concrete examples of this success.

Ms. Gosselin explained that the UNESCO's role as an intergovernmental organization was to advise member states on social policy development in the fields of education, science, culture and also communications. To be able to do this well, she remarked that the agency maintained a number of experts and very close relationships with ministries of social affairs. She cited this as a very important part of their work in informing their own strategies on education, protecting cultural diversity and on access to information.

In her presentation, Ms. Gosselin focused on four essential entry points. The first was the need to understand the societies in which people live, and the way they transform themselves. Here she highlighted the work of the MOST Programme which brings across all of the work UNESCO does in all of its areas of focus.

The second mentioned was Education for All. She pointed out that UNESCO provided active assistance for reaching the Education for All goals, which are part of the Millennium Declaration and part of the MDGs which contain two goals directly related primary education. She went on to say that UNECSO recognizes the importance of education beyond the primary level and provides assistance to member states in developing the proper educational policies and necessary training for teachers that will empower the students to make the right choices in our evolving societies.

Ms. Gosselin described a third feature of UNESCO's work which deals with protecting and promoting cultural diversity. She noted her approval of the strategy of the European Union that made a reference to dignity and full participation and to the very important strategy and target of cultural integration. She expressed concern that these issues do not get enough attention.

A fourth entry point focused on strengthening the capacity of local societies, and to inform those that are excluded of their rights and give them access to the knowledge needed to become empowered and make the right choices.

Ms. Gosselin went on to provide information on the work of UNESCO. With Educational for all, UNESCO works with other international actors on the Global Programme of Action that aims to promote literacy, provide a basic education for all, attain gender parity in education, and prevent HIV/AIDS which has a direct impact on both the education system and on school teachers.

As the leader of the UN system on education, she noted that UNESCO produces an annual educational report entitled, *State of the World's Education*. She reported that considerable progress had been made in improving access to education yet acknowledged much more needs to be done to reach gender parity. Ms. Gosselin also raised the issue of financing as one of the areas where Education for All has not made great advances. She stressed that free, compulsory education was particularly needed in poor societies as even small fees are a barrier for the poor.

To improve the quality of education, UNESCO provides countries with policy advice and expertise on the kind of education young people need today, and is working to better target those who are excluded. She also spoke of the integrated provision of education, a factor to all groups of people and particularly indigenous peoples. She pointed out that education must be provided in a language that all can understand for it to be inclusive. UNESCO worked alongside the UN system as part of the indigenous forum to provide best practices and link different countries that provide specific opportunities for indigenous societies. UNESCO is also working with Governments, NGOs and the UN community to look at the specificity of the needs of persons with disabilities and acknowledged that much more need to be done.

On the issue of culture and respect for cultural diversity, Ms. Gosselin remarked that it begins with recognizing that people are different. Over the past 60 years, UNESCO has worked with member states to develop a body of international conventions on everything from protecting world heritage to the protection of cultural diversity. UNECSO and its partners recognize the importance of culture and affirmed that the destruction of another's culture is not justifiable under any circumstances as cultural heritage is irreplaceable. She noted that this is the year of multilingualism and UNECSO is working with member states to preserve and protect languages as an estimated 50 per cent of the vernacular languages are lost every year due to integration.

Ms. Gosselin highlighted several aspects of UNESCO's strategy on providing access to information ranging from helping and defending the freedom of expression and of the press, to ad hoc work in communities by providing them with multimedia knowledge centers and working to preserve libraries and indigenous knowledge. She stressed that the majority of the world does not have access to basic information about their culture or their governance possibilities.

In her final comments, Ms. Gosselin raised the issue of cities as areas of proximity and also of exclusion. She urged for greater focus on the very important role that cities should be playing to help UNESCO improve the services that they provide to member states.

Ms. Axumite Gebre Egziabher called attention to 2007 as a turning point in history, as it was the first time greater numbers of people were living in urban areas than in rural areas. While growth in urban populations was occurring world wide, she highlighted the particularly rapid pace with which it was growing in the developing world. She used Africa as a ruler continent, which has the highest degree of urbanization, where growth was recorded at 4.58 per cent compared to approximately .75 per cent in developed countries. She noted that the cities of developing countries are least prepared for the influx of people and many have ended up living in slums which are exclusionary, offer no social protection, and do not provide equal access to land or infrastructure and basic services. It was revealed that even in developed countries 6 per cent of the urban population lived in a slum-like environment.

The two main pillars of the Habitat agenda, as outlined by Ms. Gebre-Egziabher, are adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world. At present, UN-HABITAT is working to operationalize what it means to have cities without slums. Ms. Gebre-Egziabher explained that cities also needed to be made safer, and there must be security of tenure and inclusion. She illustrated some security issues that needed to be addressed such as in cities where women are not allowed to own or rent a house, or where forced evictions are taking place. She offered an example of UN-HABITAT's work to address these issues one of which focused on property reinstitution for widowed women in Kosovo.

In a global campaign launched by UN-HABITAT to promote good urban governance and security of tenure, it was found there is often a lack of appropriate management and a lack of capacity at the local level. It was also noted that severe gender inequalities persisted in local governance and almost no women were serving as councilors. She argued that for women to be able to learn and contribute to solving the problems of their communities, they must be included in local governance.

She pointed out that it took UN-HABITAT 10 years to build the guidelines for decentralization policies, and after Istanbul+5, which she helped to organize, it was found that there continued to be a lack of decentralization of human and financial resources. Although many countries reported that they had decentralization policies in place, they

were not practically implemented, and this also carried negative consequences for local labour which was often overlooked.

Ms. Gebre-Egziabher highlighted the fact that UN-HABITAT has been working to form partnerships with local governance. The work necessary to provide housing, infrastructure and basic services is an enormous task that requires a great deal of investment and it has been agreed that this work must be done in partnership with officials at the local level. Ms. Gebre-Egziabher argued that it was necessary to find ways to strengthen the capacity of the local authorities and help them become facilitators (not providers) to identify problems and find solutions together with their communities.

UN-HABITAT's concept of inclusive cities underscores the importance of participatory planning and management. Ms. Gebre-Egziabher stressed that all stakeholders including women, NGOs, youth associations and residents have the right to identify and find solutions to community problems. UN-HABITAT has been working to manage a process that will empower a community as a whole, and that will enable different groups to connect with each other and with local government to improve their access to land, to basic services and infrastructure and also work with the National Ministries to implement policy change.

Ms. Gay Rosenblum-Kumar discussed her work in the UN interagency Framework Team on Coordination for Preventive Action, defined as 'developmental conflict prevention'. She works with communities in contentious situations to get them to talk with each other and develop trust so that problems can be managed as they arise. She examined the intersection of social inclusion and her field of conflict prevention work. Ms. Rosenblum-Kumar explained that in her case, inclusion did not address issues such as gender and disability but inclusion as opposed to exclusion based on membership in minority groups, religious groups and ethnicity, which she defined as factors that tend to cause violent conflict in society.

She made the distinction between conflict prevention, which connotes external intervention and interference in the affairs of a state, and conflict transformation which starts with local ownership and local recognition in conceiving of the capacities necessary to be effective. As an outsider with the UN, she stressed the importance of coming to the table with humility and that while it was possible to make suggestions and help catalyze activities, the UN cannot lead them. Ms. Rosenblum-Kumar stated that conflict resolution and social inclusion are the responsibility of national governments and that the United Nations can best be of service by sharing examples from other countries of what does and does not work.

Ms. Rosenblum-Kumar highlighted 5 dimensions of social inclusion that were integral to her work in conflict prevention. The first mentioned was 'visibility', meaning acknowledgement and a right to one's identity. She stated that to be visible, one must be considered a citizen and included in society, although not necessarily integrated. The second dimension was 'consideration', which relates to having one's position respected, accepted and acknowledged. The third dimension discussed was 'access, equally to

services' such as education, housing, health, the labour market, and the right to communicate in one's own language. The fourth was 'protection of and access to human and political rights' including the right to state protection, free speech, access to information and the right to land. The final dimension was 'access to power and resources'; enough to participate in society and negotiate power.

She noted that all of these elements are present in every situation, but some may have a higher salience in one society than others, and that is where the line between what can be negotiated non-violently and what may deteriorate into violence may be discerned. Some elements are not negotiable, such as identity, whereas access and human rights are more content-oriented and negotiable. She also explained that often these elements build upon each other.

She informed the audience that negotiations over power and resources were the most difficult to resolve, and that a conflict prevention element was necessary in post conflict situations as statistics have shown that almost 50 per cent of the time these situations revert to conflict within 10 years. She stressed that this was because the root causes of the conflict are related to social cohesion and were not being addressed. She stated that people need to know that they are part of a nation that accepts them and will give them a voice. If these issues are not addressed and structures for inclusion are not created then peace will not be possible over the long term.

Ms. Rosenblum-Kumar noted when working on projects, it was first important to develop an awareness of what these elements are and how, if they are not addressed, it can be to everyone's detriment. Secondly, a safe environment must be created, especially among decision makers at local and national levels, to develop trust and a certain amount of confidence. And thirdly, to develop capacities in society, both individual and institutional, to be able to give people their rights and proper protections.

Ms. Rosenblum-Kumar discussed a confidence building project in the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh where there had been a 20 year insurrection based on the lack of recognition by the Government of the indigenous population. In the mid-1990s, the Government finally agreed to sign a peace accord and entered into negotiations with indigenous groups on access to land and social services. She remarked that it was not until the issues of identity were addressed that progress could be made. Unfortunately, because of political upheaval occurring in the country over the past ten years, very little has been done to implement the peace accord. She noted that the UN was currently working on a confidence building project in the area to get indigenous and local leadership together to talk about how to implement the accord and build confidence so that the two sides do not return to armed insurrection.

In another case, Ms. Rosenblum-Kumar referred to the Gacaca system of reconciliation being used in Rwanda of as an example of the "consideration" dimension. She observed that the national indigenous system would not bring justice in a Western sense and punish all of the perpetrators, but rather work to reach reconciliation in communities that have to live together. She pointed out that what people want is to be heard and have their losses

recognized. It was hoped that this could then lead to an apology and enable the people to move on.

In yet another example in Guyana, which is divided among ethnic lines, it was stated that the UN is working on the "access" dimension. In the country there has been a struggle over how to have inclusive governance where all people are recognized and can share in decision-making. The UN has been working with the Ethnic Relations Committee and leaders of local governance to impart participatory decision-making skills so that people can analyze and solve their problems together.

In closing Ms. Rosenblum-Kumar noted that the practical aspects of some of these projects very often focus more on the process elements, group facilitation and dynamics, and trust building between groups, rather than on the actual content of the issue. Efforts are directed at building a sense of social cohesion as well as inclusion.

In a comment made by Mr. **Robert Lee** from the **United Nations Volunteers (UNV)**, he highlighted the recent paradigm shift in the idea of volunteering from a gift relationship to one based on reciprocity. He noted that many governments put volunteer programmes in place for young people, and the UNV works to ensure that that the opportunities are extended to people throughout communities, and not just to the advantaged groups. Because volunteering comes with benefits, such as free medical attention, frequently the individuals selected by community leaders to participate were from select groups. In the past, individuals from less advantaged groups, including youth, older persons, people that are HIV positive and persons with disabilities, have not, in general, been asked to participate in volunteer work in their communities.

Mr. Robert Lee mentioned that UNV, with the support of several Governments, brought the idea of volunteering as a powerful source for social integration and social inclusion to Copenhagen plus 5, and as a result, references of volunteerism as a way to move forward came to the surface in the discussions. He also spoke of the positive benefits of volunteerism, noting that young people who volunteered were more likely to find employment and older people who volunteered tended to be healthier and live longer. In the disability community, volunteering gave people a sense of dignity.

Helen Hamlin, the main representative of the **International Federation on Ageing to the United Nations**, made a brief statement to the audience. She mentioned that she had participated in the 1994 preparatory meetings for Copenhagen and prepared a caucus on ageing which she then took to Copenhagen in 1995. She found that the concepts and the framework of the Copenhagen World Summit were in sync with her own values and activities as a social worker. She was particularly excited to be taking the issues up again at the Commission, and over the next couple years she sees an opportunity to really look at how to operationalize these dimensions of inclusion in the work related to the topic.

Mr. Sergei Zelenev in closing the discussion thanked both the panelists and the audience for their inputs. He stated that the event was deliberately created to bring on board some of the issues which will be discussed next year, but also to preempt, to an extent, the

discussion and delineate certain crucial issues. He further emphasized that inclusiveness in this sense, on the one hand is a goal and on the other it is a process and actions taken must bear this in mind.