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STATEMENT BY

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Mrs Chairperson, Excellencies and distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to address this session and deliver the Chair 's statement. My speech will cover the following issues:

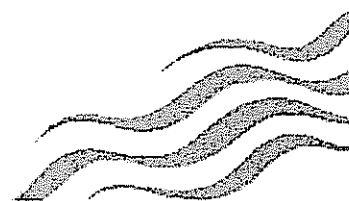
- The concept of social integration
- The background for "A Society for All"
- Concrete examples from Finland on comprehensive social protection, access to services and participation
- Concluding remarks

In 1995 in Copenhagen States committed themselves to promote 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.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for an excellent report on Social Integration. According to the report social integration is at the same time a goal and a process. Societies engage in it to advance their social development. It shall be looked at both from the perspective of society as a whole and from the point of the individual. Many different concepts like social integration, social inclusion and social cohesion are used to describe and analyse the social dimension.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Poverty is a core issue of social integration. Reducing poverty in accordance with the *Millennium development goals* is a challenge to us all. Poverty is manifested in many different ways. There are, however, clear links between poverty and illiteracy, unemployment, poor health, disability and old age. In many countries especially children and older women are at risk. A first step towards social integration for people living in poverty is to respond to their



basic needs. Furthermore comprehensive social security systems as well as universal social and health services help to reduce poverty.

Human rights, equal opportunities and solidarity are the cornerstones on which we build a *Society for all*. If we seriously want to achieve the international development goals that have been set we must include people faced with specific barriers or experiencing discrimination in the mainstream of socioeconomic development.

According to global trends the concepts that underpin our discussions today are the following ones:

To move from targeted to inclusive policies. Persons faced with discrimination and exclusion are not an isolated group. They are one of us. The needs of special groups should be mainstreamed in all relevant policies.

Secondly, to go from specific to comprehensive policies. Social, economic, employment and educational policies can be mutually reinforcing.

Thirdly, to change from a socio-medical perspective to a human rights approach. We have to focus on strengths and possibilities instead of weaknesses and inabilities. Human and social rights form the foundation on which social integration must be built.

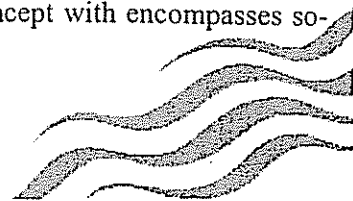
And last to allow citizens and their organisations to take an active role instead of being passive targets. A society for all can only be built if there is scope for the participation of all of us. This requires empowerment in particular of those living in vulnerable situations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to address the overarching theme of social integration from three perspectives: Firstly comprehensive social protection, secondly access to services and thirdly Participation. I will now explain how I see these perspectives by giving some concrete examples from Finland.

Comprehensive social protection

In order to strengthen social integration we need a comprehensive and effective social protection system. Comprehensive social protection is a broad concept with encompasses so-



cial security benefits as well as social and health services. A strong social protections system can contribute to strengthening a country's competitiveness.

The existing Finnish social protection system is essentially well-functioning. Comprehensive social protection covering the entire population – the universal approach - has contributed to the fact that poverty and social exclusion are relatively uncommon and gender equality well realised in Finland. The new challenges, however, especially the demographic change, require a constant developing of the system.

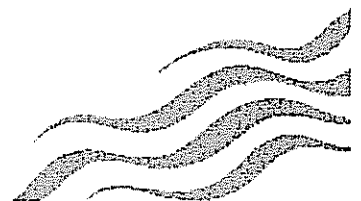
The Government has appointed a broad-based commission to reform Finnish social protection. The goal of the reform is to offer new incentives for work, to alleviate poverty and to provide an adequate level of basic protection in all life situations. This reform will be implemented in such a way that social protection can be funded on a sustainable basis in the long term.

Access to services

I believe that it would be a huge mistake to dismantle existing social and health services due to the economic crisis. I am convinced that social and health services play a vital role in increasing social cohesion and alleviating the impacts of economic recession. Universal access to services is a matter of political will.

In Finland our municipalities are by law responsible for arranging social and health services to their residents. The whole population is covered by the municipal services on an equal basis. Citizens' access to health care has been improved through a recent reform introducing waiting times to care. The health care legislation is currently being updated in order to respond to new challenges. Our legislative reforms have aimed at strengthening the status of service users.

To secure sufficient social services to old people, persons over 75 years have been given a subjective right to have an assessment of their service needs. In spite of all these reforms we still face challenges concerning regional differences and health inequalities between population groups.



The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has introduced quality recommendations and evidence –based care guidelines for the municipalities. Steps will be taken to further improve quality assessment, supervision and guidance of services. Furthermore, a social and health care innovation project is currently carried out aimed at improving the impact and effectiveness of services and expanding the diversity of services.

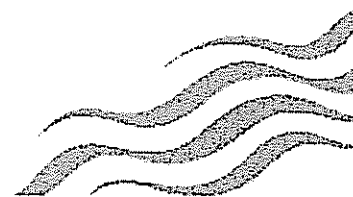
Participation

A good society is measured by the extent to which it responds to the need of its weakest members. It's necessary, therefore, to create an enabling society that is based on democracy, equal opportunities and full participation. We need to focus more on removing barriers. Awareness raising activities are prerequisites for shedding light on unnoticed barriers and problems.

The Finnish government has set up specific policy programmes in order to address politically important questions in a cross-governmental setting. One of the programmes concerns the well-being of children, young people and families. The objective of the programme is to reinforce the policies preventing social exclusion. In 2005 the government furthermore appointed an Ombudsman for Children. Her task is to promote the realization of the rights and interests of children at the policy-making and legislative levels. She works in wide collaboration with all stakeholders in order to strengthen the co-operation in child policies.

In 2006 the Government adopted its first comprehensive child and youth policy programme. It aims at a child and youth-friendly Finland through concrete objectives for different life areas. At local level municipalities are obliged to establish structures and mechanisms that allow children and young people to influence and be heard in matters concerning them.

I fully support mainstreaming all the needs and perspectives of special groups in relevant policies. I am convinced that we in addition need specific programmes and positive actions in order to achieve factual equality and full participation of persons that are in a weaker position than the population in general.



I would, therefore, like to mention two specific programmes we are currently starting up. The first one is a national action programme on Roma policies. The aim of the programme is to promote the equality and participation of Roma people in all life spheres. The other programme concerns disability policies. The objective of the programme is to create a strong foundation for human rights, non-discrimination, equality and inclusion. The work will be based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Naturally, target groups will be well represented in both programmes together with governmental officials and other stakeholders.

To conclude, my main messages to you are in a nutshell:

- We need comprehensive policies to ensure that social integration go hand in hand with employment, educational and financial policies.
- We need to uphold social protection and high-quality services despite economic crisis
- We need to regard social protection as a productive investment for the future.
- We need to make clear that the best way out of poverty is decent work
- We need to focus more on prevention and promotion of health and welfare

In all our actions, we must always remember to put people first. Thank you!

