

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**Statement by
MR. SHA ZUKANG
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
TO THE 47TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
New York, 4 February 2009**

Madame Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main task of this 47th session of the Commission for Social Development is to review the theme of social integration – which, together with employment creation and eradication of poverty, form the three pillars of social development.

The World Summit for Social Development in 1995 defined social integration as the process of building the values, relations and institutions essential for the creation of a “society for all”. Social integration thus creates the enabling political and social environment that enables societies to achieve national development and to meet the internationally agreed development goals.

Sadly, however, social integration still does not receive the attention it deserves on the development agenda. This Commission has a unique opportunity to change that situation – and to provide valuable input to this year’s substantive session of the Economic and Social Council and next year’s comprehensive MDG review, as well as to the General Assembly’s upcoming conference at the highest level on the world financial and economic crisis and its impact on development.

The challenges before you are made all the more urgent by the negative impact of the current global crises on social development and social integration.

Many lives – especially in the poorest and most vulnerable communities – are becoming a sheer struggle for survival. Increasingly, families who have lost jobs and incomes are unable to afford the costs of food and shelter for their households. Many cannot pay medical bills or send their children to school.

Such harsh circumstances create fertile ground for conflict and instability. The recent food crisis brought violent food riots in a number of developing countries. And economic and social stress in families tends to exacerbate violence against women. Tough economic times also lead people to think of themselves – and to reduce their support for inclusive social policies. These are just some of the possible adverse effects of the current crises on social integration.

One lesson from the current crises is that markets, on their own, cannot deliver economic prosperity, social inclusiveness and justice for all. We have seen that unregulated markets cannot even deliver market stability.

Governments have a very important role to play in creating an enabling environment for markets and the private sector. Governments must also ensure that economic progress contributes to social progress and inclusion.

Distinguished Delegates,

Let us recall the major unifying idea forged in Copenhagen in 1995, and reinforced again in 2000 and 2005 – the need for a people-centred development.

At this session, the Commission will review the relevant mandates pertaining to some of the most vulnerable groups within our human family, in particular youth, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Even when societies achieve solid economic growth, and despite legal and legislative progress, social exclusion still exists because of entrenched discrimination and prejudice – including gender-based discrimination, racism and discrimination in access to employment and education.

We must bridge the gap between legal provisions and enforcement. Effective anti-discrimination policies must be urgently put in place and fully implemented to ensure that all vulnerable social groups are protected. This will be a main focus of the upcoming Durban Review Conference in April, on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Social integration processes are also particularly important in post-conflict or other vulnerable societies. Addressing issues such as social inclusion, social cohesion and social justice are an essential part of building a foundation for lasting peace.

Madame Chair,

A critical review by the Commission of progress made and remaining challenges in promoting social integration will lay the ground work for a productive policy session next year.

To further implementation, our commitment to social integration must be operationalized and made more concrete. What can this Commission do to spur

this effort and ensure greater prominence for social integration in the development agenda and development efforts worldwide?

To this end, I would like to offer the Commission the following reflections:

First, it is worth recalling the Copenhagen agreement that social integration is rooted in respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, diversity, social justice and the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, democratic participation and the rule of law.

Second, ultimate responsibility for promoting, nurturing and ensuring social inclusion and integration rests with Governments. Therefore, Governments should urgently review their existing socio-economic policies, to assess their contribution to social integration and social cohesion. The report of the Secretary-General recommends additional steps to be taken by Governments: to establish government capacity tasked with promoting and monitoring social integration; to promote full employment and decent work for social and economic inclusion and poverty reduction, with particular attention to culturally, socially and economically marginalized groups; and to implement policies and enforce laws that explicitly prohibit all forms of discrimination.

Third, Governments, acting alone, cannot achieve social inclusion. Engaging civil society and working with the private sector are critical for the success of any socially inclusive policies. This message was made loud and clear at yesterday's Civil Society Forum.

Fourth, socio-economic policies should be inclusive and equity-enhancing. Increasing public participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy is one way to enhance social integration.

Finally, social protection reduces vulnerability and promotes equity, poverty reduction, integration, stability and cohesion. Governments should therefore consider introducing a social protection floor for the most vulnerable and marginalized groups as another concrete step towards social integration. This should include basic health care, child benefits and income security.

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need clear and effective measures to promote social integration and inclusion.

In these times of economic hardship, social unrest, outbreaks of violence and other forms of social disintegration are more likely to intensify, threatening the stability of societies.

I trust the important deliberations of this Commission will guide us towards consensus-building and realization of the goal of a “society for all”.

Thank you.