

ISRAEL

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Statement by
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Madam Chair,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. Israel shares with many other States here a strong interest in promoting social integration, a concept which takes under its broad mantle so many of the issues with which we are concerned in the United Nations.

Madam Chair,

Israel welcomes the Secretary-General's recent report on social integration, which presents a concise overview of the many facets of this issue. We agree with its observation that, at its core, social integration is about providing equal opportunities and encouraging people to seize them. In addition to social inclusion and economic opportunity, it is our position that having a meaningful voice in a State's decision-making process is equally important. In this regard, we would have preferred a more unequivocal statement in the Report that true democracy is an inseparable element of social integration. Democracy should not primarily be considered as either supporting social integration, or as a potential outcome, but rather as a core value in its own right.

Madam Chair,

I would like to briefly share a few of the challenges Israel faces in its quest for social integration and some strategies the State has adopted to address them.

Gender inequality is one of the most prevalent forms of social exclusion in the world, and this is no less true in Israel, where women earn 84% of men's pay. While this inequality is less extreme than in many other nations, it is a gap that the Government is determined to close. To this end, high-level Government bodies in the Knesset – Israel's parliament – and in the Prime Minister's Office are dedicated to drafting legislation and initiating programmes aimed exclusively at promoting gender equality. In addition, the recently formed Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, within the Labour Ministry, is tasked with supporting legal recourse for all types of employment discrimination.

Israel's vibrant civil society complements these Governmental activities, and includes a number of organizations devoted to the rights and welfare of women and disadvantaged social and cultural groups.

Israel faces some unique challenges in the economic integration of its Arab population, which comprises about 20% of the country's people. Israeli Arabs enjoy equal rights, but still lag behind much of the rest of the country in economic indicators. The Authority for the Economic Development of the Arab, Druze and Circassian Sectors, which is located in the Prime Minister's Office, works to encourage economic and business activity within these populations and to integrate them into the national economy. Additionally, a joint cross-ministry-civil society initiative educates senior civil servants on the needs of Israel's minority populations, and promotes the fair distribution of State services.

In the area of employment, the labour participation rate among Arabs is far lower than in the general population. This trend is especially pronounced among Arab women, although this is partially due to tradition. The disparity serves only to widen the economic gap. In response, the Government has adopted an affirmative action plan to promote the hiring of Israeli Arabs in the civil service.

In the private sector, a number of NGOs offer entrepreneurship training programmes tailored to Israel's Arab population. Israel's experience demonstrates the advantage of close cooperation between governments and civil society. The two-pronged approach provides for institutional change at the top, and empowerment at the grass-roots level.

Madam Chair,

Migrants are increasingly in the spotlight as civil conflict, economic collapse and even climate change have created unprecedented waves of human movement around the globe. In many countries, migrants are particularly vulnerable because of abusive working conditions coupled with a lack of legal protection, or a lack of knowledge of their rights. In a proactive response, the Israeli Government has produced a handbook on workers' rights which is distributed in many languages, both in Israel and in workers' countries of origin.

Moreover, as a country of immigrants coming from extremely diverse cultures, Israel has a well-established set of institutions that work specifically on issues facing recent arrivals. While each group has its own specific needs, which are addressed, the aim is to mainstream individuals as quickly as possible into society at large. The Government supports all aspects of integration, from the challenge of learning a new language to job training. From the aspect of integration of immigrants, Israel is a vibrant human mosaic.

People with disabilities also face unique challenges with respect to integration. My country supports the work of the Commission's Special Rapporteur in monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. We hope that the nomination process for the Special Rapporteur's replacement will be swift, and will not result in any gap in this position. The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a further step in advancing the full integration of disabled people. The Convention boldly brings together both human rights and social integration aspects in one instrument. Israel was an early signatory to the Convention, and my Government hopes that it will be ratified as soon as possible.

Madam Chair,

People in both developed and developing countries alike are finding that their lives are ever more precarious. As the Report points out, globalization can affect labor markets in negative ways, increasing employment and wage insecurity in some industries, while widening inequality. In such cases, Israel assists displaced workers in the short term by ensuring that there is an adequate social safety net in place, and in the long term by assisting in retraining in growth fields.

Many States are rightfully concerned that the deepening global economic crisis will sharply reduce the resources that can be devoted to social integration and development. We urge states to continue to devote attention and dependable and adequate resources to such programmes at a time when marginalized persons and groups may find themselves even more vulnerable.

In conclusion, Madam Chair, States have a vested interest in promoting social integration. If recent history has taught us anything, it is that social exclusion and insecurity often lead to civil unrest which, in turn, can spill over borders and create regional instability. Of course, equality of opportunity is also a just cause in itself.

We encourage all States to view the full and active participation of all their citizens not with apprehension, but with satisfaction in the maturity of their societies and their States. A dynamic, informed and engaged population, including women, men, and all social groups, will serve to strengthen the State. Israel pledges to continue down this path toward the full participation of all its citizens, and to share its valuable experiences with other States.

Thank you.

