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**Statement by
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TO THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM,
“COPENHAGEN+15: ACHIEVING A SOCIETY FOR ALL”
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Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address this Civil Society Forum, focused on “Copenhagen + 15: Achieving a Society for All”.

You have set yourselves the task of assessing the progress made since the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. Such an assessment should help identify how best to advance social development through social integration, the theme of the Commission for Social Development.

We have seen some real progress at the global level. Copenhagen recognized that working towards an inclusive society requires urgent action to remove the barriers to inclusion faced by many groups. This recognition led to the development of significant mandates and instruments in the years following the World Social Summit.

Let me illustrate a few of the important frameworks, in which Civil Society played a critical role.

In 1995, a global agenda for youth was established by the World Programme of Action for Youth, which set in motion the identification of new priority areas for action. The World Assembly on Ageing adopted the International Plan of Action on Ageing in 2002. Its first review and appraisal five years later indicated several areas of success, including new social protection mechanisms to assist older persons.

In 2006, the groundbreaking Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted. Following its ratification, many Member-States have enacted national legislation frameworks banning discrimination against persons with disabilities, and introduced policies to promote greater access to education, employment and health services.

The rights of indigenous peoples are being more widely recognized in large measure, thanks to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly in 2006. The Declaration advocates social inclusion of indigenous people in society, at the same time affirming their right to maintain their distinct social and cultural institutions and practices.

All these instruments have served as guidelines for the development of national policies and programmes to improve the situation of social groups.

For instance, some Governments established or reformed social protection mechanisms for the most vulnerable.

Many took measures to improve employment opportunities for young people and persons with disabilities.

National legislation was adopted to do away with ageism, sexism and other forms of discrimination.

Parliamentary quota systems improved the participation of women and minority groups in political decision-making in many countries as well.

In addition to mandates aimed at improving the situation of specific groups, several regional and national frameworks for social integration have been recently established, such as “African Common Position on Social Integration”, “Social Inclusion Principles for Australia” and national Action Plans for Social Inclusion in the member countries of the European Union to name but a few.

Yet, despite this progress, much remains to be done. As social integration, together with poverty eradication and full employment, form the three mutually reinforcing pillars of Copenhagen, overall social development can not be achieved without further efforts on this front.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Civil society has a vital role to play in achieving social integration. Your support in designing, implementing and monitoring comprehensive and inclusive social policies is essential for these efforts to succeed.

You can send a clear message to Governments that national policies to advance social integration should be based on global mandates already agreed upon and anchored within the frameworks of social justice, non-discrimination and inclusion of all members of society.

You are in the best position to inform local Governments. What are the priorities of your communities? What needs to be done to improve conditions, on an urgent basis and over the longer-term?

You have a special capacity to reach out to the marginalized and excluded among us, helping voices to be heard; supporting the fulfilment of their human rights.

Your work at the grassroots level can mobilize local communities for collective action.

You can help to develop concrete benchmarks for Governments to measure the progress of the social integration strategies they adopt.

In sum, you have two profoundly important contributions to make: to help hold Governments accountable for the promises they have made at Copenhagen and since then; and to assist Governments and other partners in turning these commitments into reality on the ground.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Department greatly recognizes the efforts you have made to promote social integration. The recent survey on social integration, prepared by the NGO Committee for Social Development entitled: Social integration in action: stories from the grassroots provides many examples of the kind of good work that civil society organizations are doing. The survey demonstrates that action at the local level is making real progress. We need to draw on the extensive practical

experience of your organizations and your support for those most marginalized and excluded.

Let me close by thanking you for all your hard work in support of development efforts world-wide, and social integration initiatives on the ground. My Department also counts on your continuing commitment to bringing the world closer to the political, economic, ethical and spiritual vision for social development expressed 15 years ago: one “that is based on human dignity, human rights, equality, respect, peace, democracy, mutual responsibility and cooperation...”

I hope that this session of the Commission for Social Development will result in concrete policy recommendations on how to bring us closer to this goal, a goal that cannot be achieved without your continuous support.

Thank you.
