

CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ON POVERTY ERADICATION

Statement by
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NEW YORK, 8 FEBRUARY 2011

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends All,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Civil Society Forum, organized on the occasion of the 49th Session of the Commission for Social Development. It is my hope that this Forum will offer much needed insight on how to rid the world of poverty, and forge a society for all.

As has been the practice, the summary of your deliberations today will be shared with the Commission for Social Development during its opening plenary meeting tomorrow. We look forward to learning of the results of your meeting.

Civil society organizations have long been valuable partners in the fight to eradicate poverty. Your experiences at the forefront of efforts at the grassroots level have provided us with important lessons.

The MDG Summit, held in September last year, reviewed progress towards the MDGs, in particular the target to halve poverty and hunger by 2015. While it acknowledged good progress and practices in many countries, it is very clear that much remains to be done.

Most societies continue to be characterized by significant economic and social disparities, in which persistent poverty sharply contrasts with growing wealth. Numerous indices of well-being – wages, income and wealth distribution, employment trends, education and health statistics – mostly point to increasingly unequal societies.

The 2010 Report on the World Social Situation (RWSS) highlighted various problems in measuring poverty. With its new data, the World Bank's poverty estimate rose from under a billion in 2004 to 1.4 billion in 2005, suggesting greater poverty, but also greater progress. Using the new Multidimensional Poverty Index, the 2010 Human Development Report estimates the number of poor people at 1.7 billion!

Meanwhile, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) claims that, over the past decade, the number of hungry was rising every year to over a billion in 2009, before declining marginally with lower food prices and modest economic recovery in 2010.

The 2010 RWSS was critical of poverty reduction programmes based on good governance, strengthening property rights without redistributive reforms, 'bottom of the pyramid' marketing, and commercial microcredit – well before the recent criticisms.

The impacts of the global financial, economic and food crisis have made our task of reducing poverty even more challenging, often affecting various social and economic groups in very

different ways. These effects have also varied across and within regions and countries. Less skilled workers, youth, older persons, and migrant workers have often suffered most in terms of lost jobs, benefits and earnings.

The 2011 RWSS considers the adverse impacts of the financial and food crises, especially on sustainable development, poverty and inequality, underscoring the need for consistently counter-cyclical and developmental macroeconomic and inclusive financial policies, programmes, institutions and instruments.

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the Commission for Social Development, we will hear about the importance of achieving inclusive, job-rich economic growth in order to reduce poverty. Yet, in many countries, job-rich economic growth remains elusive, while global economic recovery remains tepid, uncertain and uneven. With premature stimulus withdrawal and fiscal austerity, the prospect of a double-dip recession cannot be discounted. Recent European trends in some countries underscore this risk.

To make matters worse, food prices are rising again. Extreme weather conditions, likely linked to climate change, threaten food security as never before. The effects of food diversion for biofuels and animal feed, and much greater commodity price speculation with lax monetary policies, may also have pushed up food prices again. All these present a fundamental challenge to our efforts to reduce poverty and hunger.

To effectively address economic insecurity and vulnerability, governments should put in place universal social protection systems and measures to help livelihood regeneration. These measures should include not only income support, but also protection of achievements in other developmental objectives, such as better nutrition, health and education outcomes.

But most poor countries do not have enough fiscal resources for these social protection and livelihood regeneration programmes, and little is being done multilaterally to enhance national fiscal space. ODA trends are not promising, while policy conditionalities attached to credit from IFIs typically weaken overall estate capacities for development and social progress.

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Innovative and practical solutions for poverty eradication are essential to address the challenges posed by the current global situation. I am sure you will have much to share in this regard with the Commission for Social Development, the UN system and your colleagues.

I congratulate the NGO Committee on Social Development. In collaboration with NGLS, the Committee undertook the survey on implementation of the resolution on promoting social integration, which was adopted by the 48th Session of the Commission. This report will be of great interest to the development community, and would not have been possible without your initiative and hard work.

I take this opportunity to thank you all for your continued support and for your valuable partnership with the United Nations Secretariat in support of the work of the Commission for Social Development.

I wish you a very productive and successful meeting.

Thank you.