

**OPENING STATEMENT BY
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TO THE UNITED NATIONS
PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
AT THE 49TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
9 FEBRUARY 2011**

Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure and an honour to address you today, at this opening of the Forty-Ninth Session of the Commission for Social Development.

As you are aware, the Economic and Social Council is the main forum in the United Nations for discussing international economic and social matters, and for formulating relevant policy recommendations. ECOSOC, as a coordinating body, has a crucial role in merging the normative and operational aspects of the United Nations' work.

Since 2005, under its Annual Ministerial Review, ECOSOC has been responsible for assessing progress made towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as well as the implementation of the other goals and targets agreed to at the major UN conferences and summits.

In recently laying out my priorities for assuming Presidency of the Council, I stressed the need to promote stronger collaboration between the Council and its functional commissions, as well as to enhance the alignment of its work with that of other UN entities and regional mechanisms of the UN Development Group. With the necessary cooperation, ECOSOC can be more strategic, bold and forward-looking.

The Commission for Social Development has the distinction of being the first functional commission to assemble each year – this is a weighty responsibility as well as a privilege. In the current climate, the international development goals to which we all strive – and the eradication of poverty, in particular – seem further from grasp; although the world is on track to meet the global target, under Millennium Development Goal One, of halving the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015, many individual countries will fall short. Even if the global target is reached, nearly 900 million people will be living in poverty in 2015.

Distinguished Delegates,

The priority theme of poverty eradication for this session of the Commission is closely intertwined with the theme of the 2011 Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) of “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education”.

We know only too well that the goals of poverty eradication and education for all are fundamental and interdependent. We are beginning to better reflect this relationship in our measurement of poverty. For example, the new multidimensional poverty index takes account of deprivations in education, among other needs.

The poverty-education nexus is clearly reflected in the work of the UN. As the Secretary-General underscores in his report on the priority theme, a “vicious circle...exists between income poverty and...low levels of education.” Access to quality education is essential for seizing opportunities to emerge from poverty, yet people living in poverty confront persistent barriers to realizing an education.

The past decade has seen remarkable improvements in the field of education, particularly at the primary level. However, much remains to be done, and the recent global crises have slowed progress previously made towards many social development goals.

Many of the countries most affected by poverty are not expected to meet Millennium Development Goal 2 on universal primary education. Without urgent measures, 56 million children are expected to be out of school in 2015. Currently, 759 million adults are illiterate, two-thirds of whom are women.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that the individuals and families behind these numbers are society’s most marginalized. They are more likely to be young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous persons and women. Without access to quality education, they are also more likely to pass the burden of poverty onto their children.

At the 2010 Millennium Summit, Governments reaffirmed their commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 through adopting an action agenda. The Commission can help to sustain the momentum generated by this important outcome.

One way to achieve this is by emphasizing in your deliberations the importance of implementing a social protection floor to reducing poverty and enhancing social development, even as national budgets are under strain. The UN’s Social Protection Floor Initiative, aimed at combating poverty, insecurity and inequality, contains a specific provision for education. Its social transfer component entails four essential social security guarantees, among which are family/child benefits to facilitate access to education, nutrition and care.

I commend the Commission for giving due recognition to the critical importance of social protection by selecting it as the Emerging Issue for special attention during this forty-ninth session.

Chair,

I assure you that the important messages and recommendations put forward by the Commission during its forty-ninth session, as well as those conveyed in the background documents prepared by the Secretariat, will guide and support the Council’s analytical and policy work as well as its coordinating function.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you commence your work, I urge you to focus on practical policy measures that will serve Member States in their poverty reduction efforts over the coming year, while bearing in mind the strategic needs for meeting our long-term development goals.

I look forward to your constructive discussions and to the outcomes of the forty-ninth session of the Commission and their elaboration within ECOSOC. I wish you much success in your endeavour.

Thank you.