

**Commission for Social Development
New York, 10-21 February 2003
Agenda item 3 (a): Priority theme:
National and international cooperation
for social development**

**Presentation of the outcome of the Second International
Forum for Social Development**

**Remarks by Mr. Jacques Baudot, Coordinator of the Forum
10 February 2003**

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present to this Commission the highlights of the second meeting of the International Forum for Social Development, which took place last October in New York.

A written *Summary of Findings* of this meeting is available in the back of this room.

This Forum, launched 15 months ago, is an initiative of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Placed under the framework of the technical cooperation activities of the Department, it is financed by voluntary contributions. It brings together persons from different regions, mostly representatives of the civil society, for informal debates on issues of international cooperation and development. The overall theme, or motto of the Forum is *Open Societies, Open Economies: Challenges and Opportunities*.

The subject of this Second Forum, *Cooperation for Social Development: The International Dimension*, is relevant to part of the priority theme of your agenda. Allow me to make four points, drawn from the two days' debate with our twenty or so invitees.

First is the question of the conception of social development. There is, in schematic but accurate terms, a minimalist and a comprehensive conception of social development. The Forum took a **comprehensive approach**, in line with that taken by the Social Summit and the 24th Special Session of the General Assembly, which was a comprehensive and I believe, realistic approach to social development. It considered international cooperation for development, in its various normative and operational dimensions, and attempted a broad assessment of the effects of this cooperation on the social development of developing countries. Put differently, the Forum took a **social perspective on international cooperation**, that is, a perspective shaped by concerns, or criteria of levels of living, of distribution of these levels of living, of participation, and of social relations and social structures. Relevant questions were, for instance, are the cooperation policies in the domain of trade, or foreign investments, fostering or hampering the social development of developing countries? Or, is international cooperation contributing to the reinforcement of traditional elites?

With a minimalist conception of social development, the Forum would have attempted to circumscribe that part of international cooperation that is specifically geared to social development, seen as an addition of social sectors and concerns for some specific groups. This would have been in the logic, for instance, of the 20/20 approach. This minimalist approach to social development is reflected in the documents and statistics of the operational activities of the United Nations system, and also in official documents of a more normative and political character.

Related to the minimalist approach to social development, and this is my *second* point, is the question of **the very existence of social policy as an identifiable domain of public reflection and action**, either at the national or at the international level, as a domain comparable to economic policy, trade policy, or foreign policy. The ideas that permeate the dominant political culture and that, to a growing extent, give its contours to international cooperation for development seem to contribute to the marginalization of social policy and in fact to its disappearance as a domain of political action. Mentioned during the Forum as causes and manifestations of this trend were the rise of humanitarian concerns and humanitarian cooperation, the “mainstreaming” of human rights without a comparable effort at understanding the social structures, institutions and processes through which these rights are promoted or violated; the emphasis on the local level that tends to reduce the importance and legitimacy of national distributive and redistributive policies; the related emphasis on targets and target groups; the reliance on private funding and private initiative, including charitable organisations, to deliver social programmes; and, in general, the negative sign attached to public institutions, public spending, and public services. It was noted that people are treated as consumers and that social policy and social development requires citizens and their active participation. Is it possible without an ambitious and coherent social policy, competing in some cases with an equally ambitious economic policy, to progress in the social development of developing countries, or even to reduce poverty?

Third is the central and related question of the **coherence**, the consistency of the various facets of international cooperation for development. Not coherence in itself of course, but coherence from the point of view of the social development of developing countries. For instance, is a better, that is, a more equal distribution of income, which is

pursued by certain forms of technical and financial assistance, supported or contradicted by the recommendations made to developing countries on the orientations of their macro-economic policy? Or, are the guidelines and assistance offered to developing countries in the domain of education supported or contradicted by the recommendations they get on public spending and the financing of public services? The impression, or I should say the informed sentiment of the participants in this Forum was that such coherence left much to be desired. Some even thought that there was indeed coherence in the policies of international organizations *vis-à-vis* the developing world, but the wrong type of coherence, dominated as it were by the interests of the most powerful actors on the international scene. And a link would seem to exist between this tendency and the prevalence of a minimalist conception of social development and the disappearance of social policy as an identifiable field of public action. In any case, it was felt that this was a subject deserving a major effort of the UN system, under the leadership of the United Nations, and involving not only serious research, but a continuing debate and dialogue with all the actors and current victims of the development process.

Fourth, the social development of developing countries, again seen comprehensively, implies the **participation** of these countries in the globalisation process, that is in the shaping of the world economic, financial, social, cultural and political structures. Participation not only in the benefits, and costs, of this process, but in the decisions that give it its orientations, and therefore its impact on social development. Integration of the developing countries into the world economy, which is a major current objective of international cooperation for development, ought to be completed by a more equal and more participatory system of global governance. More participatory with a greater involvement of the governments of developing countries, but also of the people of the world, through their social movements and other expressions of the civil society. In other words, international cooperation has to make a greater contribution to the reduction of the distance, some would say an alienating and dangerous distance, that seems to be increasingly separating ordinary citizens from the institutions that govern them. Good governance is a concept also applicable at the international level. The view of the Forum was that a greater and in some respects more institutionalised participation of governments and people of developing countries in the process of globalisation was a necessity and would increase the likelihood of this process being beneficial to the maximum number of people.

International cooperation is indispensable to the development of developing countries, including to their social development, and above all international cooperation is indispensable to the building of a peaceful and just world community. The Forum was acutely aware of this fact. There is no alternative to cooperation, but anarchy or the absolute reign of the most powerful, ending unavoidably in violence and destruction. But, in the view of this Forum, international cooperation is in need of a renewal, almost of a renaissance, in quantitative and qualitative terms, if it is to be a help rather than an obstacle to a people-centered type of development. The Commission may wish to take this view into account when discussing its priority theme.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your attention and for having given me the opportunity to address this Commission on this important and difficult topic.