

Launch of the World Day of Social Justice, February 10 Highlights from Panel Discussion

The launch of the World Day of Social Justice took place in conjunction with the 47th session of the Commission for Social Development, at UN Headquarters in New York, on February 10, 2009.

The following speakers presented their statements and testimonies:

H.E. Kirsti Lintonen, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Finland and Chairperson of the 47th session of the Commission for Social Development

H.E. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the 63rd session of the General Assembly

Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General, DESA and Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

H.E. Mary Robinson, Founder and President, Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative

Mr. Lucas Benítez, Co-Director, Coalition of Immokalee Workers

Ms. Renana Jhabvala, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

H.E. Mr. Nurbek Jeenbaev, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations

Mr. Petr Wija, Department of Social Inclusion, Czech Republic

Ms. Tahirih Naylor, Chair of the NGO Committee on Social Development

The following issues were highlighted during the panel discussion:

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

- Ensuring social justice for all has become especially important in the light of the impact of globalization, technological change, demographic ageing, increased migration and economic slowdown.
- Focusing on social justice is critical in the current economic, financial, food insecurity and climate change crises, with the most marginalized being the most affected.

BASIC FRAMEWORKS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

- A basic framework for social justice was advocated at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, 1995, which recognized that development aimed at social justice, solidarity, harmony and equality within and among countries and that social justice, equality and equity constituted the fundamental values of all societies.
- It is vital to pursue social justice at national and global levels by developing appropriate policies in accordance with the three pillars of Copenhagen: social integration, poverty eradication and full employment, expanded by the concept of decent work.
- There are many links between social justice and human rights as both highlight the importance of equality, democracy, participation, transparency, accountability and inclusion. And both place the concept of “justice” front and center in efforts to forge a more stable and equitable world.
- There is no need to invent a new social justice approach, as we already have one. Rather, the challenge is to reorient policies and priorities in support of social justice and ensuring their effective implementation.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

- Any arrangement of society which excludes or hinders certain groups within it from their fair share of the common good is a violation of social justice.
- Social justice is intrinsically connected to the promotion of social development, integration, inclusion, cohesion and to the creation of a ‘society for all’.
- Only when the principles of social justice are fully respected can we actually achieve a socially inclusive society.
- People living in poverty, persons with disabilities, older persons, disaffected youth and other groups must be brought into the mainstream of society.
- Social integration with its broad aim of including people in decision-making processes and improving access to opportunities for all requires far more efforts at creating solidarity across divides of wealth, ethnicity, gender and so on, and more forceful targets for disadvantaged groups.
- Advancing a socially inclusive agenda requires better leadership on the part of governments, the private sector and the civil society.

POVERTY ERADICATION

- Anti-poverty strategies should be aimed at addressing its root and structural causes and manifestations; equity and the reduction of disparities must be part of those strategies.
- To advance social justice Governments should focus on ensuring basic needs, including nutrition, health, water and sanitation, housing and access to education and employment for the most marginalized groups and individuals.
- Regionally appropriate ‘social floor’ minimum standards should be developed.

DECENT WORK

- Decent work is an important pathway to social justice and it should extend to the workers in the informal economy.
- A decent work agenda encompasses putting employment creation as a central objective of governments’ economic, fiscal and trade policies. It must guarantee respect for human rights related to work, including the ILO core labor standards; social protection for all, through, among other things, health insurance and unemployment measures and ensure social dialogue between government, employers, workers and broader civil society.
- The Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization urged social partners and governments to cooperate on:
 - ensuring effective enforcement of a minimum package of labor rights for workers and enterprises in the informal economy that upholds and goes beyond the Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at work
 - improving the quality of labor market institutions to create synergy between the protection and productivity of the poor
 - guaranteeing basic business rights for the poor, including the right to vend, have a workspace, and have access to infrastructure and services
 - promoting inclusive financial services that afford access to much needed capital for all income groups
 - implement the above in ways that strengthen gender equality
- Recommendations on tackling the financial crisis from a side event “Working out of Crisis: Aligning finance with Decent Work and Fair Globalization”, convened by NGLS, ILO and Realizing Rights, during the International Conference on Financing for Development, at Doha, in 2008 focused on:
 - making sure that the flow of credit is maintained

- preserving minimum wage rates
- ensuring that social protection systems are working and extended for unemployment benefits
- ensuring that training opportunities are offered and include women and workers at the bottom of the ladder
- starting emergency employment schemes
- Countries that respect labour rights are building up more sustainable growth, development and exports, while “beggar-thy-neighbour” policies only feed the crisis further.
- Decent work objectives should be an integral part of any new multilateral framework to reform global economic governance.
- There are numerous examples of effective mobilization for collective action in fight for social justice, including ‘Campaign for Fair Food’ demanding more humane labour standards, including higher wages and ‘Fair trade’ movement.
- The exploitation of farm workers and cases of modern-day slavery need more attention from government and the media to ramp up consumer awareness crucial to the success of a market-led consumer awareness and adopting of zero tolerance for slavery.
- Social justice for workers in the informal economy has to be recognized as they lack basic protection. The informal economy is the main form of employment in most developing countries with 71% of workers in Asia, 78% in sub-Saharan Africa, 51% in Latin America and 47% in West Asia and North Africa are in the informaleconomy. The informal economy is robust and productive and drives growth. In India nearly 60% of GDP comes from the informal economy, whereas in Sub-Saharan Africa 93% of new jobs came from the informal economy.
- Women’s organizations, including Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) have shown that poor women organizing themselves for employment and social protection, raising their voice and visibility can lead to reduction of poverty, social integration and most important, livelihoods with dignity
- It is vital to strengthen the informal economy by
 - recognizing the existence of this sector and listening to informal workers’ voice.
 - encouraging all forms of employment, especially women’s employment
 - providing safety nets for the informal workers should be part of the financial bail out plans being proposed.
 - expanding of microfinance, micro-insurance and micro-pensions should be considered.

- Investing in building the skills and capacities of the informal economy, especially for youth is needed.

GLOBAL FINANCIAL ARCHITECTURE

- The global financial architecture has to be recast in such a way as to ensure that the marginalized have full access to the economic and social systems locally and internationally and policy making that recognizes human rights of all members of society.
- Developing countries have to be integrated into a more fair and responsive international financial framework.

PARTICIPATION AND AWARENESS RAISING

- Social justice movements including those advocating human rights, labour rights or women's rights should join forces to advanced shared agendas.
- The role of the civil society organizations in promoting social justice and social integration as fundamental elements of social development should be encouraged and supported.
- Member states were encouraged to raise awareness of the principles of equity, democracy, participation, transparency, accountability and inclusion that provided the basis for social justice.

LEGAL RECOGNITION

- According to the findings of the Commission on the Legal Empowerment of the Poor, in some countries up to 85% are outside the rule of law, without access to justice, and know very little about their fundamental rights. They live and work in the informal sector where they lack secure land tenure, and in situations where children are not registered at birth - in some Least Developed Countries up to 70 % of children are without documentary proof of their existence facing multiple exclusions and risks of exploitation.
- Full recognition of legal identity, assured access to the courts, basic labour protection, the right to own property, and the rule of law to prevent exploitation by the powerful are all vital tools to enable the poor to realize their full potential.

IMPORTANCE OF THE WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

- World Day of Social Justice could serve as a support and coordination mechanism to monitor progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.
- The central aim of the Day is to help re-focus the attention of governments and people everywhere on important commitments which remain unfulfilled.
- World Day of Social justice should be seized to galvanize action and fresh approaches to address our shared responsibilities and solve our shared problems.

OTHER INITIATIVES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

- Initiatives aiming at promoting social justice mentioned during the discussion include: ILO Declaration of Social Justice for Fair Globalization (2009), European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010), EU's Renewed Social Agenda for Creating Opportunities, Providing Access and Demonstrating Solidarity, European Youth Pact and Disability Action Plan.