



**DRAFT STATEMENT**

**ECOSOC President at opening session of Commission for Social Development  
New York, 8 February 2021**

***Priority Theme: “Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all”***

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to join you at the opening of the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission for Social Development.

This year we are meeting under uncertain circumstances.

The fallout from the COVID-19 Pandemic continues to ravage economies and societies. The development of vaccines against the disease is a hopeful sign. However, it is painful to witness that it would not be available for majority of peoples living in the Global South for several years.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder of the key role social development plays in protecting people’s lives and livelihoods, as well as the planet.

Social development is one of the critical pillars like the economic and the environment for making the world more sustainable and resilient.

**Excellencies,**

Article 55 of the UN Charter entrusted the ECOSOC with the mandate to pursue international cooperation to promote “better lives in larger freedoms”

The World Summit on Social Development was convened on the recommendation of the Commission on Social Development, one of the functional Commissions of ECOSOC.

The outcome of the World Social Summit 25 years ago contained the notion of “transformative resilience,” that is now among the principles of the 2030 Agenda.

The past 25 years have witnessed extra-ordinary progress in human and social development with the reduction in poverty, higher education standards, employment growth, rising incomes, and longer lives for hundreds of millions of the world’s population.

However, despite the progress, inequalities have risen to an unprecedented level: today 26 people own half the world’s wealth.

Our Secretary General rightly pointed out during his Nelson Mandela lecture last July “Inequality is the hallmark of our times”.



The current crisis has put into bold relief these existing vulnerabilities and inequalities of our current financial and economic architecture.

While the virus knows no borders, it is painfully obvious that the poor and vulnerable countries and peoples are impacted the most.

The difference in amount of stimulus packages between the developed economies and the developing economies would dictate the time of recovery of countries will be different. Advance purchase agreements for the COVID-19 vaccine have also created vaccine inequality among nations.

I believe the lessons learned in implementing the outcome of the World Summit could help countries in “building back better”.

We need to foster transformative resilience by choosing policies that tackles high and rising inequality based on age, gender, location and other factors and for fostering the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups, communities and individuals.

We must choose policies that empower people and communities to become more resilient and offer multiple opportunities for decent work and social and economic transformation. The current crisis is a clear indication that business as usual cannot continue.

A socially just transition towards sustainable development is critical in our efforts to enable more inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery and to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of digital transformation, which is expected to further exacerbate inequalities by widening the existing digital divide.

As I pointed out earlier the existing digital divide could become the new face of the development divide.

Therefore there is an urgent need to tackle factors behind the digital divide which include lack of infrastructure, high cost of digital equipment, lack of digital skills and literacy, and absence of relevant content in local languages.

Closing the digital divide requires significant investment in infrastructure to connect people. Sustainable infrastructure is fundamental for achieving all the SDGs, for it is a vehicle for transitioning towards a more resource efficient and greener economies and a prerequisite for inclusive growth.

As highlighted by the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, achieving universal access to broadband will require an estimated \$428 billion.

Affordability is another key obstacle to closing the digital divide, especially for marginalized groups and poor rural communities.



To tackle digital skills and literacy, there is an urgent need to invest in people, by improving access to quality education.

We need also to strengthen international cooperation to build a digitalized global economy, accompanied by necessary regulation and fair competition.

The Secretary General has proposed a roadmap for digital cooperation. I believe progress on this is essential to bridge the digital divide.

**Excellencies,**

This is the time for innovation, creativity and solidarity.

I look forward to contributions of Commission for Social Development as we build back better during the decade of action.

**I thank you.**