



UNRISD

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Statement by The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be with you this year, on behalf of the UNRISD Board, in order to present some of the highlights of our work over the biennium 2005–2006. We have submitted a report of activities which is numbered E/CN.5/2007/6.

The Commission will be aware, Mr. Chair, that UNRISD has always adopted a broad definition of social development emphasizing not only people's material well-being, but also social cohesion, security and justice.

Our research programme continues to focus on social justice, poverty reduction and equity—three explicit principles of the Millennium Development Goals. UNRISD is engaging with these issues by examining the ways in which improvements in social institutions, social relations and social welfare affect not only people's well-being, but also economic development and democracy. The Commission will recall that the bulk of our work is carried out by researchers based in academic institutions around the world. Such networking allows us to develop large international research programmes whilst maintaining a minimal staff in Geneva.

A new phase of the UNRISD research programme was initiated during the biennium, and through 2009 our work is being carried out under six themes:

- Social policy and development
- Democracy, governance and well-being
- Markets, business and regulation
- Civil society and social movements
- Identities, conflict and cohesion
- Gender and development

In the short time available to me, allow me to highlight selected key results of our work over the past two years.

I wish to mention, first, the role of social policy in social protection, development and democratization.

UNRISD research on social policy and development was carried out in more than 40 countries and involved 118 researchers, mainly based in or from those countries. Our work on social policy has yielded important insights into policy and institutional arrangements conducive to well-being and equality. For example, the prevailing view that social policy in developing countries should be targeted toward the protection of vulnerable groups and poverty reduction is too narrow. Rather, social policy should lean toward universalism, and must be concerned not only with social protection but also redistribution, production and social reproduction. Similarly, macroeconomic policies should be concerned with promoting patterns of economic growth and structural change conducive to social welfare and poverty eradication, and avoid a narrow preoccupation with reducing public debt and inflation, or promoting privatization. Policy coherence is crucially important, and synergies among different areas of social and economic policy must be nurtured. Social policy must not be seen as a separate area of policy intervention dealing with social protection and equity: it is also instrumental in economic development, democratization and national cohesion.

This research has attracted wide attention, and has been used in numerous publications, documents and conferences. It has been cited in academic journals, and used in university curricula and by civil society organizations. This UNRISD work was also prominent in the 2006 International Forum on the Social Science–Policy Nexus organized by UNESCO and the Governments of Argentina and Uruguay, in which ministers of social development from 13 countries participated.

Second, Mr. Chair, allow me to draw the attention of the Commission to another significant area of work over the past two years: the publication and dissemination of the UNRISD policy report on gender and development. The extensive background research for this report examined the gender impacts of macroeconomic policies; the changing situation of women in relation to work, social policy and politics; and how women are affected by both conflict and peace-building. The report presents certain guiding principles that policy makers should observe, not least the need for gender equality to be taken into account when assessing the effectiveness of macroeconomic policy, as well as excellence in public service. Unless governance reforms take into account the way institutions are shaped by unequal gender relations, they may simply reproduce gender inequalities.

This report has been commended in academic journals, cited in United Nations documents, covered in the national media where launch events have been held, and is being used in educational institutions in North America, Europe and Africa. The Arabic and Chinese editions of this report will be launched next month.

Turning to work under our current research agenda, Mr. Chair, I wish to inform the Commission that UNRISD has embarked on a major initiative that will contribute to understanding different paths to poverty reduction and the improvement of policies and institutions. Researchers drawn from many countries and a variety of disciplines will assess the contribution to contemporary approaches to poverty reduction, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Poverty Reduction Strategies, and examine the tensions, complementarities and synergies between

different components of “policy regimes”, including social, labour market and macroeconomic policies, and political and regulatory institutions. This work will emphasize institutional and political issues that are often not adequately addressed within both academic and policy-making circles. This work will culminate with the publication of a flagship report in 2009.

Our programme of work for the next biennium also includes research on the mechanisms for financing social policy, and measuring its results. Research on gender issues and social movements will continue, as will work on the role and impact of the business sector in social development, and study of the ways in which people’s identities affect patterns of social exclusion, cohesion and conflict.

Allow me to conclude, Mr. Chair, by referring briefly to some other aspects of our work.

Like all policy-oriented research institutions, we are deeply concerned with the utility of our research to policy makers. Through our various activities, we therefore aim to transfer knowledge from sites where it is generated to sites where it may be used.

UNRISD issued 99 publications in 2005–2006 and greater effort was made to synthesize findings in a format accessible to policy makers. We disseminate our research results widely through these publications; through our own events and those organized by other institutions; in media coverage; and via the UNRISD Web site. Considerable effort also went into improving co-ordination and collaboration with other UN research entities and other agencies. The small group of senior research staff in Geneva are called upon regularly to act in a range of consultative and advisory roles, for which we fulfilled nearly 100 requests over the past two years.

As the Commission is aware, UNRISD receives no funding from the regular United Nations budget and depends entirely on voluntary contributions from member states, research foundations, United Nations agencies and other institutions.

In this connection, Mr. Chair, it will be of interest that in 2006, at the request of the government of Sweden, and in collaboration with the governments of Finland and Norway, an independent evaluation was carried out to assess the relevance, quality, impact and cost-effectiveness of UNRISD work from 1996 to 2005. Our other core donors—Mexico, Switzerland and the United Kingdom—were closely associated throughout the process.

The evaluation found that UNRISD has promoted a coherent and distinctive perspective on development, and has provided important inputs for the United Nations summit processes. UNRISD research fosters an interdisciplinary perspective, and plays an important role in stimulating debate and in mobilizing scholars from developing countries. Adequate quality control mechanisms were found to be in place: UNRISD was found to be cost-effective; and its autonomy was found to be valuable and deserving of protection.

While commending the Institute’s impressive range, number and quality of publications, the evaluation recommended that UNRISD devote greater effort to improving the visibility and impact of its work. The evaluation also called for putting

UNRISD finances on more secure and stable foundations, and for an overall increase in funding.

In closing, I would like to express my own gratitude, and that of the UNRISD Board, to those governments that have responded positively and generously to our fundraising efforts over the biennium, as well as to the various foundations and other bodies that have provided support for specific projects.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.