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**STATEMENT BY**

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**Forty-eighth session of the Commission for Social Development  
High Level Panel on Social Integration**

**NEW YORK, 4 February 2010**



Mr. Chairman

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to express my views on the issue of social integration.

Social integration - the active involvement of individuals and social groups in the economic, social and cultural life of society - is essential for the happiness and welfare of people and the internal strength and stability of countries. It is however a multi faceted process with diverse aspects as the reduction of poverty, empowerment of women, the emancipation of disabled people, the improvement of the position of the elderly. Problems and opportunities differ from country to country, and each of these groups has special needs and problems. In this introduction I'll limit myself to the discussion of two effective instruments of social integration: decent work and social protection.

Dutch policy is predicated on the conviction that employment -and with that I mean decent work- is key to social integration and social protection. Decent work is not only a source of income, but also the basis for active social interaction, personal development and acquiring new skills. Being without a job often implies a progressive seclusion from society; unemployment, poverty and social exclusion are closely related.

The best opportunities for social integration are achieved through full employment and decent work. The Netherlands therefore warmly applauds the adoption by the General Assembly of 'full employment and decent work for all' as a theme for the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008 - 2017) that should have the highest priority in all considerations (resolution A/63/230 of 19 December 2008).

Reinforcing our efforts in implementing the program of decent work is therefore of eminent importance. But decent work requires social protection because the labour market is not a normal market. The worth of people is not determined by their scarcity or abundance, the preciousness of life is not dependant on its shortness. People are not a commodity that can limitlessly be modified and manipulated to meet every need of the market or of employers; they are not objects but self-conscious, autonomous thinking social actors, with an intrinsic dignity and moral value. Decent work, full employment and social protection, in one form or another, are therefore a key to social integration.

We should therefore try to reinvigorate the old words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (\*Article 23): "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment." And "Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection."

Words that were adopted in another age but that haven't lost any bit in their relevance. We haven't achieved paradise in these past sixty years but we have made some progress. In the process our situations have diversified. European countries presently face other problems than emerging economies and developing countries.

Yet at the present moment in time we are all more or less equally affected by the effects of the financial crisis that in most countries has developed into an employment crisis. It shouldn't turn us away from the process of globalisation, but rather make us more aware of its possibilities, risks and inherent limitations. Politically it is easy to raise the spectre

of globalisation. In all our countries -developed, developing and emergent- there is a broad suspicion among people that globalisation is realised at their expense over the backs of the poor and the weakest participants in the labour market. This despite the fact that the opposite has been shown to be true by the improvements during the last decades of economic expansion.

Moreover, stopping globalisation is not a realistic option. It is like crying 'stop the world I want to get off'. We have become dependant and addicted to globalisation; it has become part of our social integration on a global level, whether we like it or not. Globalisation is not a 'zero sum' game as the growth and development of all our countries over the past twenty years has proven. But we still have to learn to control it and manage its risks for the benefit of all. It will also require an improvement of the mutual trust in the benefits of globalisation and a fair outcome. I therefore endorse what the ILO calls 'social justice for a fair globalization' and support the common declaration on 'more and better jobs'.

In that context I would like to address a specific aspect: the common improvement of social protection in all countries. This improvement is of vital importance to allay the fear that economic development progresses at the expense of the social dimension. Social protection is a basic pillar of decent work. However 80% percent of the global population does not enjoy a set of social guarantees that allows them to deal with the risks of life. Therefore, we should try to develop and promote global standards in the field of social protection.

This need that has also been recognised by the Chief Executives Board of the United Nations. In their Communiqué of 2009, urging the need to assist countries and the global community to confront the crisis and build a fair and inclusive system of globalization, they endorsed nine joint initiatives to promote this goal. Two of these initiatives are the Global Jobs Pact and the Social Protection Floor. Both are ILO initiatives which the Netherlands strongly supports. The ILO together with the World Health Organisation is a Lead Agency in taking on the initiative to develop a social protection floor. I call upon all other international organisations and on governments to assist them in this task.

Global social standards are not only necessary in order to combat poverty and to foster sustainable stability in national social societies. They are equally needed to promote a fair global competition and to create a level playing field. Global social standards are thus in the interest of developing, emerging and developed economies.

A "social protection floor" should include a basic set of essential social transfers, in cash or in kind, to provide a minimum of livelihood and security for poor and vulnerable populations, be it in the form of access to essential services, such as health care, food support, clean water and education. But it would be pointless and even counterproductive if we would try to introduce uniform rules and levels of protection worldwide. It wouldn't work and would thereby reinforce suspicion instead of trust among populations. Any attempt to promote a uniform level of protection would in my country be seen as an attempt to erode the existing social protection, whereas it would be seen in most other countries as an attempt to raise burdens on the economy to a level that would stifle any further growth. A social protection floor should recognise the differences in economic development and levels of protection, and should try to correlate these and strive for an upward moving social floor in concordance with economic development.

This process would prompt countries to improve and extend their social protection in concordance with their economic development. At the same time a basic social protection floor wouldn't impose unreasonable burdens on developing economies, while not in any

way infringing on existing obligations. This approach would also bring social protection within reach for large groups within the population of developing countries. If we would be able to develop such a conceptual common framework, we could reassure our populations that globalisation will not develop at the expense of social protection, whilst reassuring governments and employers that they wouldn't get caught in a regulatory straight jacket which might hamper their economic development.

Eventually we would be able to provide decent jobs to all and provide our people with a social protection floor, thus helping them with economic and social integration. So they can fully participate in society.

There are of course various ways and means to reach this goal, but we first need to have a good discussion on these issues. The Netherlands is glad that this item is put on the agenda of the International Labour conference in 2011.

A meeting like the commission for social development can play an important role in this process. We are here to learn from one another. We shall have to work together to make use of the opportunities provided by globalisation to combat poverty and other social ills worldwide. This is a common goal that we adopted 60 years ago in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It won't come about in one fell swoop, but by steady progress, step by step, as a result of mutual support, increasing cooperation and a broad exchange of views and experiences. Together we will achieve more than we would achieve alone.

I look forward to your remarks and questions.

