



**Commission for Social Development, 48<sup>th</sup> Session**  
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Thank you Mr. Chair, and my congratulations on your election to this session of the Commission on Social Development.

Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of ESCWA, I am pleased to address this session of the Commission on Social Development, especially as we celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development. It was at that global assembly in Copenhagen that governments committed to the promotion of social integration by fostering inclusive societies that are stable, safe, just and tolerant; societies that respect diversity and promote equality of opportunity; societies that encourage the participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

Across the world, there still some way to go until we reach the goal of creating a truly inclusive society for all. Even in Western Asia, millions of people face several obstacles to social integration, including poverty, unemployment and insecurity. According to some estimates, close to 35 million people live under the 2-dollar-a-day poverty line in the region. Looking more closely behind the numbers we know that there are many groups and categories among the poor who face obstacles beyond, or in addition to, poverty. The inclusion of these groups in society is not only an ethical priority; it is also an economic and social imperative.

There can be no doubt that inclusive societies are better equipped to achieve peace and prosperity. This basic premise informs a number of ESCWA projects and initiatives that focus on assisting our member States in implementing their national strategies to enhance social integration. Some of these initiatives are illustrated in an ESCWA brochure prepared for this session of the Commission.

The underlying assumption is that the benefits of initiatives focused on alleviating income and ensuring access to social services can only be maximized if accompanied by socially inclusive policies targeting the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including the youth, the elderly and people living with disabilities. This includes consultative and participatory approaches to ensure that social integration policies also reflect the interests and needs of vulnerable groups.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The global economic and financial crisis that has swept the globe has not left our region unscathed. Although overall figures indicate that most Western Asian economies have weathered the worst of the crisis, the long-term effects on the poorest and segments are often concealed by national and regional averages. One particular area of concern is unemployment and the growth of the informal economy. This is an area in which vulnerable social groups are often over-represented in many countries.

In the ESCWA region, many governments have responded to the crisis by stimulating job creation through increased investment in infrastructure. Some governments have also adopted measures to support workers through job and skills training and more elaborate social protection systems. Bahrain, for example, has launched an unemployment insurance scheme that is financed by contributions equally shared between workers, employers and the Government. By disseminating these and other innovative national initiatives, ESCWA also aims to facilitate the exchange of good practices in the areas of social protection and social integration at the regional level.

In today's political, economic, and financial climate of uncertainty and insecurity, a focus on social integration takes on added urgency. ESCWA is committed to working with member states to put in place institutional frameworks and mechanisms that support an integrated approach to social policy and mainstream social integration into national development planning.

Thank you.