

CIVIL SOCIETY DECLARATION

For the 62nd session of the UN Commission for Social Development on the priority theme

“Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication”

Today, more than ever, our world is substantially and crucially fragile. Our society, our well-being, our future is threatened by structural inequalities and multiple layers of injustice. Our social contract has been broken by extreme poverty and hunger, intersectional discriminations, profound gaps in social protection, persistent and devastating gender inequalities and disparities, economic instability, the climate crisis, the widening digital divide, global migration, the threat of nuclear war, the global cost of living crisis, the “care crisis”. The world is facing one crisis on top of another. The COVID-19 pandemic, with severe economic and social impacts, only amplified these systemic imbalances. These structural challenges have made every effort for inclusive and resilient societies less effective, failing in essence to deliver a sustainable future for all.

This is the time to rethink our whole approach to society, to accept and implement social change and transformation. Peoples’ needs are changing in response to a quickly evolving context. People want more responsive action to address these key challenges. Today, we need to envision a different kind of world. A disconnected and fragmented approach to social, economic and environmental policies has not produced the desired results toward poverty eradication and reducing inequality. We need leadership to establish a renewed social contract integrating social, economic, environmental and political justice at both national and international levels. These are the pillars of international peace, prosperity and security, as it was stated in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development.¹

This renewed commitment should focus on the following [priorities](#):

1. Invest in human capital and ensure the dignity and wellbeing of individuals and families through transformative social policies and programs.

Globalization has resulted in the blurring of borders and consequently social problems are no longer confined to national borders. Inequality has steadily increased within and among nations. Addressing the root causes of social injustice and exclusion requires transformative social policies that are people-centered and equity-oriented. Social policies play key roles in social cohesion, economic production, social protection, redistribution of income and wealth, and protection of

¹ [Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development](#), A/CONF.166/9 Chapter I, Annex I para.5, World Summit for Social Development, 1995, accessed on August 1, 2023

life. Transformative social policies and programs entail opportunities for decent work and employment and for access to public services, especially universal basic income, education, housing, health care and social protections, within a human rights framework. It is essential to adopt a “whole society” approach in the formulation of national and international development plans which includes gender-sensitivity, accountability, transparency, and elimination of corruption in decisions.

2. Reform existing global financial structures based on solidarity to address global economic inequalities.

Recurring shocks and challenges, ranging from COVID-19 recovery and supply chain disruptions, to severe global inflation and widespread food insecurity, demonstrate that the current global economic structures, regardless of the income level of a country, are not providing for the wellbeing of all. Global financial cooperation is required at far deeper and more meaningful levels, including around labor policies and structures. We need a new financial architecture, an overhaul of the global trade system, debt restructuring and fiscal policies that support the Sustainable Development Goals, eradicate poverty, and reduce inequalities, including gender inequality. Financing for development cannot be considered in isolation, it needs to be clearly linked to its main purpose: protection of basic human rights and eradication of poverty.

3. Ensure that all people have equal access to a healthy and safe environment and fair protection from environmental hazards and risks.

Climate change has caused the loss of livelihoods, housing and jobs, as well as parts of territories in some countries. Climate change is impacting, inter alia, public health, food and water security, peace and security. Vulnerable groups are hit the hardest having fewer means to cope and adapt. Changing climatic conditions are also linked to internal and cross-border migration and exacerbated conflict over access to natural resources. Current climate policies have been proven insufficient to address the intense and frequent extreme weather events like heatwaves, catastrophic wildfires and floods. It is evident that sustainable development cannot be achieved without respective climate action. The effects of environmental degradation on people's health and livelihood must be considered in all policy making. People-centered institutions, at the national and international levels, are essential to monitor, enforce and implement environmental law and environmental rights of current and future generations.

4. Ensure that all persons are equal before and under the law, and are entitled without discrimination to the equal protection and benefit of the law.

Everyone has the right to be recognized as a person before the law. Rights enshrined in international law for almost 80 years remain unrealized for many; not only the right to development and the right to an adequate standard of living but also the right to political participation and legal protections. Women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making

worldwide. Discrimination and exclusion based on race or ethnic groups thwarts progress as well. Discrimination faced by disadvantaged individuals and households should be seen for what it is: a form of systemic discrimination that affects a range of areas including politics, health, education, housing and employment. Sociocultural patterns need to be modified with a view to eliminating stigma, prejudices and stereotypes of all kinds and in all areas.

A Call to Action

It is with the above considerations in mind that we, the members of the NGO Committee on Social Development, call upon Member States to:

- Include people with lived experience of any kind, in the design, implementation, and assessment of policy responses for effective and impactful outcomes.
- Ensure equal access to affordable and adequate housing, low-cost nutritional food, quality healthcare, basic income, quality education, public infrastructure and services, including access to water, sanitation, energy and digital technology.
- Establish nationally owned, human rights-based, and well-financed universal social protection systems and floors.
- Prioritize and measure the wellbeing of people and the planet, using multidimensional indicators, beyond GDP, in economic policy-making.
- Extend debt relief and forgiveness for the least developed countries based on values of justice and solidarity.
- Mainstream a gender perspective into all policies and empower women of all ages in all aspects of their lives, as effective ways to eradicate poverty and achieve gender equality.
- Recognize Care as a societal responsibility and adopt policies to recognize and redistribute this vital, yet often unpaid work, in a more equitable way between men and women and across society.
- Advance Indigenous Peoples' rights to lands, territories and resources as an effective way to protect critical ecosystems, waterways and biological diversity, and to include the rights of women to own and inherit land.

We can redesign a social contract and build a more equitable, inclusive and just world if we work together in solidarity and partnership for a common good for our humanity and earth. The time is right for a second World Social Summit, as the Secretary-General has called for in 2025. All marginalized and vulnerable people need to be included in this social contract. One in which all solutions are shaped through a gender lens, so that inequality is a concept of the past not the future. Time is running out. We must act now. The future of the planet is linked to the well-being of each and every person.