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**The Social Development Summit:  
Progress and prospect**

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# **The Social Development Summit: Progress and prospect**

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The World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen 1995, has set the scene for a decisive shift in national and international attitudes towards social development. It recognised and emphasised, at the highest level of government, the gravity of social distress throughout the world. It identified useful principles, goals and directions for action for reducing this distress and enhancing human well-being.

The ultimate extent of the Summit's success, however, cannot yet be determined. It depends on the extent to which the Summit catalyses specific, well-directed and vigorous action in coming years. Amongst other things, this will require major improvements in international cooperation in economic and social fields, especially through the UN system.

## **The Summit agreements: Progress and problems**

The Summit process has helped to create wider understanding of the importance of social development, both in its own right and as a necessary precondition for achieving sustained peace and economic development. It has emphasised that social development cannot be achieved merely by relying on market forces and economic growth.

The Summit has also helped to focus greater attention on the importance of eradicating absolute poverty and achieving full employment - both are goals to which the assembled leaders formally committed themselves in the Copenhagen Declaration. It has emphasised that effective pursuit of these goals requires an enabling economic environment, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and accountable governments.

The Declaration and the Program of Action include useful commitments of a somewhat more specific kind. For example, it was agreed that each country should develop its own target date and strategy for eradicating absolute poverty and that special priority should be given to achieving specified targets in areas such as health and education which have already been established at earlier international conferences.

The Summit agreements also address the quality and quantity of resources available to help meet these targets. It was agreed in principle that the level of official development assistance should increase, both overall and for social programmes. The option of individual donor and

recipient countries applying the '20/20 principle' was endorsed, as was the need to consider options for debt cancellation. It was agreed that the impact of structural adjustment programmes on social development must be improved.

The agreements include useful commitments to strengthen the effectiveness of the UN system in economic and social areas, especially through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Commission on Social Development. It was agreed that greater resources should be provided to the UN's operational activities in these areas and that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) should work more closely with ECOSOC and other elements of the UN system.

The Declaration emphasised that basic needs concerning food, health, shelter and education have already been acknowledged as human rights in international agreements such as the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. There was a general commitment to promote these rights and seek to ensure their realisation. The Summit also maintained momentum by reaffirming important principles established at the Earth Summit, the Vienna Conference on Human Rights and the Cairo Conference on Population and Development.

Despite these major strengths, the Summit agreements are deficient in some key respects. While recognising the crucial importance of the international economic environment, no specific action was agreed to make that environment more favourable to sustained and equitable development. For example, no attention was given to reforming the international financial system in order to encourage long-term, productive investment rather than short-term speculation and manipulation.

The agreements contain no specific improvement in official development assistance or debt relief, and no specific mention is made of raising revenue for social development by taxing certain kinds of international activity such as financial transactions. There is also no concrete action to extend ratification, and improve enforcement, of relevant human rights agreements.

The Summit agreements are unduly vague about UN reform and too timid about integrating the international financial institutions and the new World Trade Organisation in the

UN system. Their excessive length, and their failure to identify a specific list of realistic priorities, is not conducive to prompt and effective implementation.

### **Mobilising the UN system**

These strengths and weaknesses in the Summit agreements emphasise the importance of developing vigorous structures and processes within the UN system to facilitate and evaluate implementation. A wide range of possible improvements of this kind was agreed in general terms at the Summit. There is a clear need, however, to be more specific and to concentrate on some key priorities.

Seven priorities for action are suggested below. They reflect a belief that international action to evaluate and advance Summit implementation should:

- give adequate attention to underlying causes of social problems, especially in the economic sphere;
- focus on achieving measurable, time-bound targets for preventing and alleviating the worst forms of hardship;
- sustain momentum through regular, well-planned intergovernmental meetings and effective processes for implementation of their decisions;
- put special emphasis on interaction at regional and sub-regional levels; and
- facilitate involvement by non governmental organisations.

The first proposal is that the UN General Assembly should adopt the Summit's recommendation that a global Decade for the Eradication of Poverty should commence in 1997. It should set a specific target for reducing absolute poverty by the end of that Decade and should set 2010 as the target date for complete eradication.

Second, the General Assembly should request ECOSOC to select ten specific targets to which priority should be given by the UN system during the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. This 'top ten' should be selected from the range of targets concerning basic human needs for food, health, shelter and education that have been adopted by various international meetings in recent years.

Third, ECOSOC should ensure completion by 1997 of the first round of regional reviews of Summit implementation which the Copenhagen Declaration proposes should be held at 'high political level' every two years. The reviews should be provided with the national anti-poverty strategies and reports on Summit implementation that are required by the Declaration, and should give special attention to achievement of ECOSOC's 'top ten' targets.

Fourth, ECOSOC should request the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to take special responsibility for assisting developing countries to prepare the national strategies and reports for consideration by these regional reviews, and for assisting non government organisations to contribute to the strategies, reports and reviews. This should include facilitation of regular non government fora at the national and sub-regional or regional levels.

Fifth, ECOSOC should strengthen itself by establishing before the end of 1995 an effective mechanism for acting between full Council meetings. It also should strengthen the Commission on Social Development by providing for the Commission to meet annually, to provide central roles for NGOs, and to join with the Commission on Sustainable Development in working on underlying economic issues of mutual relevance.

Sixth, ECOSOC should resolve this year that major themes for consideration at its 1996 and 1997 meetings should be (1) the impact of the international financial system on poverty, and (2) innovative ways of raising revenue for poverty alleviation. It should request the Commission on Social Development, and other relevant international bodies, to provide it with studies and reports on these topics.

Seventh, the General Assembly should adopt this year a target date of 2000 for universal ratification of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and it should substantially increase the resources available for monitoring implementation of those agreements, including at regional or sub-regional levels.

Non governmental organisations have a crucial role to play in lobbying for changes of these kinds, including proposing suitable priorities for the 'top ten' targets. We need to make effective contributions to the proposed debates about economic issues. We need to strengthen our own international networks, especially at the regional and sub-regional levels, and to provide powerful, sustained input to the proposed regional reviews of implementation. It may also be worth considering the establishment of a high level Independent Commission, chaired by an eminent leader in civil society, to monitor and advise upon progress towards the goals of the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

These changes in structures and processes will be pointless, of course, unless they lead to substantial improvements in the living conditions of the most distressed people, nations and regions. In particular, they must increase both the pressure and the encouragement for governments, the business sector and NGOs to play their parts in fighting poverty, exclusion and injustice. Without them, however, there is a clear danger that Summit implementation will founder and the Copenhagen gathering will turn out to have been a brief interlude of hope and concern before a resumption of 'business as usual'.

## Summary of principal commitments

This summary contains the ten main commitments in the Summit Declaration. Under each of these main commitments, it summarises other key commitments from the Declaration and Program of Action.

### Part I: Priorities for Action

#### Commitment 1

A commitment to create an enabling economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development. This includes:

- creating an economic environment that promotes more equitable access to income, resources and social services, and enhanced financial stability;
- promoting open markets while intervening where necessary to counteract market failure, ensure fair and ethical competition and enhance long-term productive investment;
- providing more equitable access for developing countries to markets, investment and technologies;
- promoting equality and equity for all women and men;
- providing transparent and accountable government with full opportunities for public participation at national and local levels; and
- fully respecting all human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, especially economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development.

#### Commitment 2

A commitment to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind. This includes:

- urgently implementing national strategies for eradicating absolute poverty by a specified date and substantially reducing other poverty in the shortest possible time;
- achieving specified target dates which have been agreed previously at the international level for meeting basic human needs such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, health care and education, and in areas such as South Asia which have substantial concentrations of people in poverty;
- improving access to land, credit, education, information and other resources by which people

living in poverty can improve their economic situation;

- ensuring adequate economic and social protection during periods of vulnerability such as unemployment, ill health, maternity, childrearing and old age;
- striving to ensure that international donors and financial institutions such as the World Bank assist developing countries to eradicate poverty and provide adequate basic social protection; and
- declaring the first UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty to begin in 1997.

#### Commitment 3

A commitment to promote the goal of full employment as a basic priority of our economic and social policies, and to enable all people to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods through freely chosen productive employment and work. This includes:

- putting employment generation at the centre of government policies, especially to combat long-term unemployment and under-employment amongst young people, women, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups;
- improving work opportunities, including innovative options for generating income, with special attention to self-employment, small and medium sized enterprises, and informal sector;
- investing in human resource development and strengthening the availability of education and training to help employers and workers adapt to changing conditions and technologies;
- promoting a fair distribution of work opportunities, with special attention to the equal treatment of women;
- safeguarding the basic rights and interests of workers, including migrant workers, and promoting respect for relevant conventions of the International Labour Organisation; and
- facilitating combinations of paid work with family responsibilities.

#### Commitment 4

A commitment to promote social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just, are based on promotion and protection of all human rights, and on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all

people including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons. This includes:

- using education, the media and other means to promote respect for democracy, the rule of law, pluralism, tolerance, responsibility, solidarity and non-violence;
- seeking to eliminate racism, xenophobia and discrimination in all its forms, and to promote enforcement of internationally recognised human rights;
- promoting universal access to education, information and technology;
- respecting cultural, ethnic and cultural diversity, and the rights of indigenous peoples, migrants and migrant workers;
- strengthening local communities and organisations, and ensuring integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable people into the economy and society; and
- providing humanitarian assistance to refugees and other displaced persons and enabling them to return voluntarily in safety and dignity.

#### **Commitment 5**

- A commitment to promote full respect for human dignity and to achieve equality and equity between women and men, and to recognise and enhance the participation in leadership roles of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life and in development. This includes:
- establishing structures, policies and measurable goals to improve the gender balance in decision making and to broaden women's economic opportunities, including the use of affirmative action where necessary;
- promoting full and equal access for women to literacy, education, nutrition and health care and removing all obstacles to their access on an equal basis to credit, property-holding and inheritance;
- ensuring women's equal right to work, including the provision of child care and other support services, and making visible the extent of women's contributions to national economies through unremunerated and domestic activities;
- promoting equal partnership between men and women in family life, including in responsible reproductive behaviour and parenthood, and in the support of older family members;

- combating and eliminating all forms of discrimination, exploitation, abuse and violence against women; and
- promoting and protecting the human rights of women, and encouraging ratification and full implementation by the year 2000 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

#### **Commitment 6**

A commitment to achieving universal and equitable access to quality education, the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and universal access to primary health care; to respecting and promoting our common and particular cultures; and to striving to strengthen the role of culture in development. This includes:

- implementing national strategies and timetables for eradication of illiteracy, universalisation of basic education and introduction, if possible, of national languages into educational systems;
- emphasising life-long learning, with a priority for women and girls, and strengthening the link between vocational training and the labour market;
- ensuring compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, recognising the rights and responsibilities of parents, and developing broad-based programmes of human rights education;
- ensuring equal educational opportunities for women and for people with disabilities, and providing education for indigenous people that is responsive to their specific needs and cultures;
- ensuring universal access to basic health care, water and sanitation, nutrition and preventive health care, achieving agreed international targets for reducing child and maternal mortality, and striving to ensure adequate services for disabled people; and
- strengthening education, prevention, care and support services in relation to HIV/AIDS and strengthening global action against the major diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, cholera and typhoid.

#### **Commitment 7**

A commitment to accelerate the economic, social and human resource development of Africa and the least developed countries. This includes:

- implementing structural adjustment programs which include social development goals, encourage trade and investment, give priority to human resource development, and promote democratic institutions;

- providing through trade, partnership, technical and financial assistance and other measures greater support for national efforts to achieve economic reform, food security and commodity diversification; adopting debt relief measures (see Commitment 9);
- increasing the level and impact of official development assistance (see Commitment 9);
- supporting urgent action by African countries to combat desertification and considering ratification of the Convention to Combat Desertification; and
- aiming to ensure that HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other communicable diseases do not restrict economic and social development.
- exploring and developing new and innovative sources of public and private funding for social development, including action by the Economic and Social Council and other UN organisations;
- implementing economic policies to ensure sustained economic growth and sustainable development to support social development;
- promoting and mobilising private savings and attracting foreign investment in productive activities;
- improving access to credit, especially for the most disadvantaged people, and promoting the development of cooperatives;

#### **Commitment 8**

A commitment to ensuring that when structural adjustment programs are agreed they include social development goals, in particular of eradicating poverty, promoting full and productive employment and enhancing social integration. This includes:

- promoting basic social programs and expenditures, especially those affecting the most vulnerable people, and protecting them from budget reductions while also improving their effectiveness;
- monitoring through the UN, in cooperation with the World Bank and other international development organisations, the impact of structural adjustment programs on social development, and improving their positive effects and reducing negative effects;
- working to ensure that the World Bank and other donors complement adjustment lending with enhanced and targeted lending for social development and that, where applicable, they give higher priority to loans for the social sector;
- promoting more equitable and enhanced access to income and resources, and ensuring that women do not bear a disproportionate burden of transitional costs; and
- addressing the social consequences of transition from communist economies, and related human resource development needs.
- ensuring that tax systems are fair, progressive, economically efficient, and cognisant of concerns about social development, and that tax liabilities are effectively collected;
- ensuring transparency and accountability in the use of public resources, and giving priority to providing basic social services;
- reducing waste and corruption, and reducing excessive military expenditure and production and trade of arms;
- facilitating the flow of international finance, technology and human skill to developing countries and countries in transition;
- increasing the overall level and impact of official development assistance and the level provided for social programs, consistent with the scale of resources necessary to achieve the Summit commitments, and striving to achieve the agreed overall target of at least 0.7 per cent of GNP, including at least 0.15 per cent to the least developed countries as soon as possible;
- agreeing between interested donor and donee countries to allocate, on average, 20 per cent of official development assistance and 20 per cent of national budgets to basic social programs;
- urgently implementing existing debt relief agreements, negotiating further debt alleviation at an early date for the poorest and most heavily indebted countries, giving special consideration through the international financial institutions to alleviating the debt burden of developing countries with substantial multilateral debt, and developing techniques of debt conversion for social programmes;

## **Part II: Resources and international implementation**

#### **Commitment 9**

A commitment to increase significantly and/or utilise more efficiently the resources allocated to social development to achieve the goals of the Summit. This includes:

- fully implementing the Marrakesh agreement on international trade, helping the least developed countries to benefit fully from it, monitoring its

impact on meeting basic human needs in developing countries, and giving particular attention to further expansion of their access to international markets; and

- providing a substantially increased and assured supply of resources for the UN development programs, commensurate with the increasing needs of developing countries.

#### **Commitment 10**

A commitment to an improved and strengthened framework for international cooperation for social development, in a spirit of partnership, through the UN and other international institutions. This includes:

- developing or strengthening by 1996 national strategies and timetables to implement the Summit commitments, and regularly assessing and reporting upon progress with implementation;
- developing quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess social development, and strengthening the systems within the UN and interested countries for collecting and analysing statistics;
- encouraging the development of non governmental organisations, involving civil society, in the development, implementation and review of policies and programs for social development;
- considering the possibility of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council convening meetings of high level representatives to discuss critical social issues and appropriate international responses;
- enlisting the support and cooperation of the UN system and international financial institutions to achieve coordinated and sustained progress with implementation, and establishing regular and substantive dialogue between the UN, the World Bank and the IMF (including consideration of joint meetings of the Economic and Social Council and the Development Committee of the World Bank and the IMF);

- recognising the Economic and Social Council as responsible for overseeing coordination within the UN system of Summit implementation, and improving coordination at the national level through UNDP field officers and resident coordinator system;
- strengthening the authority, structures and processes of the Economic and Social Council and other organisations within the UN system that are concerned with economic and social development, and bringing the specialised UN agencies into closer working relationships with the Council;
- considering through the Economic and Social Council ways of strengthening the Commission on Social Development and its synergy with related UN commissions;
- inviting the World Trade Organisation to consider how to contribute to Summit implementation, including cooperation with the UN system, and also requesting the International Labour Organisation to contribute to implementation;
- emphasising the important role of the UN Committee that is responsible for monitoring the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- considering introduction on a regional basis of biennial high level meetings of governments and international institutions to review implementation of the commitments and take appropriate measures, with review outcomes being reported by UN regional commissions to the Economic and Social Council;
- obtaining a review of implementation from the Economic and Social Council, on the basis of reports from national governments and organisations in the UN system, for consideration and action by the UN General Assembly; and
- considering Summit implementation at each meeting of the UN General Assembly, with special attention in 1996 on implementation to eradicate poverty, and convening a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000 to conduct an overall review of implementation and to consider further action.