47th Session of the Commission for Social Development

Social Integration / Inclusion:
Towards Societies of Solidarity and Mutuality
Statement from the Civil Society Forum

Introduction

We express our appreciation and strong support for the adoption by the 46th Session of the Commission for Social Development of the theme Social Integration with a two-year work cycle. We hope that our collaboration with you in developing the theme will model the effectiveness and transformative power of social inclusion. We will use this opportunity to draw on the extensive experience of our own organisations in the field, and on as wide a range of civil society actors as possible to advance social integration.

Our primary concern is social justice: that the intrinsic dignity and rights of all human beings be recognised and that these be acknowledged and promoted in all development policies. Those who are excluded must be included as equal partners in all development planning, implementation and evaluation. Both social and economic development need to be people-centred. The recent economic crisis has highlighted how essential it is to have coherence and balance between economic and social development policies.

The last months have been for all of us a strong ‘reality check.’ The global financial crisis has dramatically shown the widening gap between those who ‘have’ and those who ‘have not.’ Since most of our organisations are direct-service providers, we have seen first-hand the harsh impact of this crisis on people struggling to survive all over the world. The crisis has highlighted the need for effective, universal social security systems to ensure income security and healthcare provision. It has exacerbated already existing crises of food security, energy and the impact of climate change. All of these will continue to have devastating consequences for already marginalised and vulnerable groups worldwide.

Social integration merits the central place given to it by Copenhagen. Social integration is the means of creating “a society for all,” in which every individual and all groups have access to basic services and the opportunity to contribute to the common good. However, we suggest that the concept of social integration must be expanded. It is increasingly clear, that all groups can, and must participate fully in society, all the while maintaining their own unique identity for themselves and for the mutual enrichment of all. For this reason, we prefer to speak of social integration/inclusion.

Our reflection on social integration / inclusion has been enriched by the insights of our members around the world. Our sharing on this theme has made us more aware of the need to strengthen local NGOs and assist them in their capacity-building. We see clear signs of hope emerging within the NGO community which we would like to share with you. We will offer some examples of effective practices today to initiate the year’s dialogue on social integration / inclusion.
**SPECIAL CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

**MARGINALISED AND VULNERABLE GROUPS**
In societies everywhere we find groups who are marginalised and vulnerable, especially women and children who bear the most severe consequences of conflict and civil unrest. Ethnic minorities, persons affected by HIV/AIDS, migrants, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and, more frequently today, older persons are among the groups who also experience increased vulnerability. Another important marginal group are people from all countries or no country, who struggle daily with extreme poverty and make up the ‘underside’ of society. All of these and more are among those unable to access power in their own communities and denied the right to participate in creating the social order. From this perspective, the need to work toward social integration/inclusion has an ethical dimension which cannot be ignored.

Of particular harm to marginalized groups are practices of discrimination, stereotyping and assigning of stigma. These practices exacerbate exclusion and often become embedded in cultural systems. Practices which exclude are not only violations of basic human rights, they are intrinsically linked to conflict, alienation and even terrorism throughout the world.

**Neighborhood Parliaments Work**
The ability to create a culture of inclusion is illustrated by neighbourhood parliaments, a tripartite initiative in Southern India. The Parliaments, consisting of around thirty neighborhood families and their multi-tier federation at different levels, provide a process which builds towards universal inclusion, envisioning a world where people are in control of governance processes and thus ensure their well-being and dignity. ([www.kudumbashree.org](http://www.kudumbashree.org) ; [www.ncnworld.org](http://www.ncnworld.org)) The forums are small enough for the small voices to be heard and at the same time big enough that the forums sustain themselves and, when federated for wider impact, can lead to total well-being for all.

**EDUCATION IS KEY**
The provision of quality education for people of all ages is of special concern because it is critical to achieving social integration/inclusion and ultimately social justice. Education is a key component by which people can be empowered and through which they gain access to a better life and an opportunity to contribute to the larger society. Education fosters social integration/inclusion by:

- empowering people to develop their full potential and access to their human rights;
- developing skills for employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, increased productivity, a reduction of social inequity, extreme poverty, crime and rebellion;
- developing attitudes of mutuality and reciprocity necessary for well-being, equity and relationship. These social attitudes promote responsibility for the common good and cooperative approaches to conflict resolution.

New technologies and enterprises are making high quality education more widely and economically available to all. One example is the Open Courseware Consortium, a global collaboration of more than 200 higher education institutions creating a broad and deep body of
free open educational content via the internet. Its growing search index currently contains 3,263 courses in many disciplines, from 38 sources and 4 languages.

A second example is Curriki, a community of educators who are working together to create quality K-12 curricula materials that will benefit teachers and students around the world, via the internet. Curriki already has over 2000 online resources.

**SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS IS ESSENTIAL**

Social integration/inclusion is impossible without systemic analysis to identify the root causes of marginalization and exclusion. Some symptoms indicating lack of social integration which invite closer analysis are: all forms of discrimination based on race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief, the gap between the rich and the poor, extremism, structural unemployment due to economic globalization, lack of social safety nets, and recourse to violence as a solution to problems. Systemic analysis is the essential step to the transformation of social and economic systems. Such analysis is difficult to achieve while living within societies lacking social integration. However, analytic processes are possible where meaningful partnerships which involve all stakeholders including those who are currently marginalized are established.

If systemic analysis is to lead to social integration/inclusion, then the solutions it suggests must link social and economic growth. It must avoid the pitfalls of current development models which employ market-based economic frameworks which measure only bottom-line profit, often ignoring human cost. Instead, systemic solutions will lead to a solidarity economy or social economy which addresses human needs and economic and environmental challenges inadequately met by current markets and governments. Social models which lead to full employment, and sustainable practices and profit, support people in the pursuit of human dignity and the fulfillment of basic needs. Systemic analysis is an important tool which moves us to people-centered development, harmonizing social and economic goals.

**BROADER PARTICIPATION**

The principle that all who are affected by decisions should participate in their development, implementation and evaluation is well illustrated in the recent document produced by ATD Fourth World, “Turning Rhetoric into Action.” This text outlines effective processes to assist those living in poverty toward meaningful participation in consultations, conferences and seminars where they can speak out about their experience and contribute to the development of more effective policies. Skills development described in the text toolkit have already been used to prepare individuals living in poverty for participation in UN events.

The principle that “all must have voice” applies at the macro level as well as in local settings. Returning to our consideration of the global financial crisis, we see that the exclusive thinking which created the problem is not adequate to solve that problem. The G7 is no longer a sufficient forum for discussion of economic challenges which clearly affect the entire globe. Ongoing deliberations now include the G20, but the full G192 must be included and not only the G192 but all of the peoples of the G192. This development reflects the overarching principle that “those affected by a decision need to be part of the discussion and search for solutions.”
economic meltdown demonstrated for us that any system which does not put people at the centre will find itself bankrupt in time.

An example of a small scale enterprise that puts people first is seen in the Rural Drinking Water Systems and Health/Hygiene Charlas project in the Andean Altiplano of Bolivia. This project facilitated by the Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns illustrates how community members and an NGO collaborated to obtain safe drinking water and improve basic hygiene. Facilitators helped residents to better quality of life using existing organizational skills and indigenous values which emphasized consensus and community.

**CONCLUSION**

Going forward we will study ‘effective practices’ of social integration / inclusion in order to suggest lines of policy to help us achieve the social development of all. We stress that words must lead to action. We must find ways to build into our programs and policy development the principles of open participation, transparency and accountability. In these times of growing and nearly unbearable stress on so many people, an increase in measurable social development and social integration / inclusion is essential if we are to avoid violent rejections and upheavals of current structures.

We offer ourselves as serious partners with you in developing policies that can build just, participatory and sustainable societies. Surely this would create the necessary human security to promote and safeguard that peace which would eliminate terrorism, discrimination, exclusion, sexism, xenophobia and ensure recognition of the full human dignity of all persons.

To determine the level of progress in promoting social integration we recommend the development of concrete benchmarks and indicators which can assess levels of inclusion, participation and social justice within each state. Such an index which also measures the quality of social relations in a society can be incorporated into human development reports. These social measures, coupled with existing economic indicators, will give a more complete picture of our social progress.

The challenge before us is to turn the forces of globalization to a new global ethic based on solidarity and the enjoyment of human rights for all. We need to move towards an integrated globalization where all people participate in shaping the decisions and structures which affect their lives, where all have enough to serve their own needs and all contribute to the well-being of others. This would truly be an inclusive society and realize one of the principal aims of the UN Charter: “... to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”

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