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Statement by the

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Item 34a

General Discussion on Promoting Social Integration

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Check Against Delivery

**General discussion on promoting social integration (Item 3A).
Statement by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.**

Thank you Madam chair for giving me the floor and allow me to congratulate you with your chairmanship of CSOCD. The UK fully aligns itself with the EU statement yet wishes to add some elements from the UK perspective.

Introduction

We welcome the Secretary General's report on promoting social integration. It shows that while some progress has been made since the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, particularly in regard to efforts to address the special needs of certain vulnerable groups, there is a clear need for continuing action.

For instance on youth. Globally around 86 million young people are unemployed and they are three times as likely as adults to be jobless. This situation presents a potential crisis for today's young people, which in turn threatens national and regional social stability, peace, security and development.

That is why the UK is a firm supporter of the work of the Youth Employment Network (YEN) which works hard to promote youth employment. Last year we hosted an event which brought together a number of YEN 'lead countries' like the UK to look at how we might develop specific targets to aim for when promoting youth employment. As a direct result the lead country process has been reformed and benchmarking is now the principle mechanism to inform YEN youth employment policies.

The need for action applies to other groups too. Despite the adoption of various new international initiatives, women, older people, and people with disabilities continue to face obstacles to social inclusion in most parts of the world.

The report also shows that vulnerability to social exclusion is not static. Continual social and demographic changes such as increasing urbanisation and changes to traditional family structures pose new challenges to social exclusion. And the current global financial crisis is presenting new challenges - which will require global solutions. Economic and social policies and responses need to be aligned.

Social Integration and Related Concepts

The report highlights very well some of the complexities involved in trying to tackle the problems of social exclusion. It points out that in different countries, different groups may be excluded. In some cases people may be excluded from society in some respects while being included in others. Certain social groups may be internally cohesive within a society which as a whole is fragmented. And certain groups may see integration into wider society as a threat to their identities.

Employment and Social Inclusion

While such varied and complex social issues present us with new problems, as the report acknowledges (para 65) the labour market is consistently regarded as the defining link between excluded individuals and the mainstream of society. So while employment still remains the best route out of poverty and is critical to achieving the MDGs, increasing access to employment is not just about income, it is also a route to social inclusion. Equality of opportunity, including gender equality, is a function of a labour market that is not distorted by discrimination based on identities. We must work to end all such discrimination.

For the UK, full employment is at the heart of the Government's strategy to ensure an inclusive, coherent and prosperous society based on fairness and social justice. And as part of our national response to the current global financial crisis, the UK has announced a number of measures to help people who lose their jobs to find another one, including by: incentives to employers to recruit and train unemployed people; helping people to improve their skills;

and supporting those who want to set up their own business.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Decent Work

At the international level, as the report makes clear, the concept of 'decent work' has much potential to help promote social integration.

The International Labour Organisation is to be commended for getting employment and decent work onto the wider international agenda. Heads of States and Governments at the 2005 UN World Summit resolved to make the goals of full and productive employment for all, including for women and young people a central objective of relevant national and international policies and national development strategies.

And the ILO itself has recently reaffirmed its commitment to the Decent Work Agenda through its 2008 'Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation' and its follow-up which sets out a strategy for pursuing the four strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda: promoting employment; enhancing social protection; promoting social dialogue; and respecting and promoting fundamental principles and rights at work.

The Declaration makes it clear that how members of the ILO achieve these objectives is to be determined by each member taking into account national conditions and circumstances.

Social Protection

That element will be important when taking forward the ILO initiative to promote discussion of the idea of a 'global social floor' or a basic social protection package which is referred to in the 'Promoting full employment and decent work' paper. This idea - which might provide access to basic health care, education, social assistance to the poor or unemployed, and a basic pension - could, if pursued and followed through by the international community, make a significant contribution to facilitating social integration.

How that idea would best be realised is yet to be agreed by the ILO's

constituents. Tripartite consultations are expected in the next few months to consider the elaboration of some sort of mechanism that could give guidance to countries on the establishment of a priority package consisting of those four basic guarantees.

The scale of the issue presents a huge challenge. The ILO estimates that 80% of the world's population have little or no social protection.

The evidence which the ILO has gathered from its research and pilot projects on social protection should be helpful in the development of a basic package.

It will also be important to facilitate a country-led and country owned approach. If a new international mechanism is to be targeted at those countries with little or no social protection, then it is vital that their views are taken fully into account. Their awareness, support and engagement in any new mechanism will be crucial to its success. Partnerships with regional bodies such as the African Union Commission for Social Affairs and ASEAN will be crucial.

We also need to recall that the Declaration makes it clear that the four elements of decent work are mutually supportive and inseparable. In many cases the purpose of social protection will be to provide a safety net and a springboard back to employment. It will enable the poor to take considered risks in developing new enterprises and livelihood options.

Recommendations

National level

We therefore welcome the recommendation that Governments should pursue promoting full employment and decent work as central instruments for inclusion and poverty reduction; and design and implement basic social protection schemes as instruments to help achieve inclusion. Having said that we should not underestimate the potential difficulties involved in extending social protection to those in the informal sector.

We also support the other recommendations for national level action including

the development of socially inclusive policies which explicitly prohibit discrimination; which address barriers to participation; which include consulting excluded groups and responding to their needs; and which are evaluated.

International Level

We note the recommendations for consideration at international level. As an EU member state, the UK remains committed to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals, including the target of 0.7% of GDP in Official Development Assistance, and is strongly committed to tackling poverty and social exclusion throughout the world. We would encourage all multilateral and bilateral development partners, in the spirit of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, to work with national governments to ensure that all people have access to basic services.

We call on the international community for an imaginative response to protect the poorest countries and households from the impacts of global and environmental crises, over which they have little control, so that they continue to contribute their skills and resources towards inclusive growth and poverty reduction.

We also support the exchange of information on good practices and policies, including south-south learning,

Finally as we have said, we look forward to a full, international level debate at the International Labour Organisation on the idea of a 'global social floor' which could, as the decent work paper suggests, extend basic social protection to all and so help lift people living in extreme poverty above the poverty line.

