

February 5, 2009

***U.S. Statement by Laurie Phipps, Adviser, Economic and Social Affairs,
on Agenda Item 3(a): "Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development
and the 24th Special Session of the General Assembly: Priority theme: Social
Integration," to the Commission on Social Development, February 5, 2009***

Madame Chairman,

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on your leadership of this important body, and to wish you, and all of us, much success in this year's session.

Madame Chair, Distinguished delegates, members of civil society,

The United States was an active participant in the Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development in 1995. We stand today fully committed to work with other member states, with the UN system and with non-governmental organizations towards its goals of a people-centered approach to development.

The commitments of the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) on poverty eradication, full employment, and social integration are goals that President Obama has already articulated. It is significant, in terms of promotion of social integration, that the first Congressional bill that President Obama has signed into law is the "Fair Pay Act of 2009", aimed at ensuring that women and men of all colors, races, religions, ages and national origins, disabled or not, have the opportunity to seek equal pay for equal work.

The links between poverty, employment and social integration are clear. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in Copenhagen in 1995, when she was First Lady and a member of the U.S. delegation, "no one person can be freed from the bondage of poverty or fully integrated into society without the means to earn a living." One of the first priorities of the new U.S. administration is to promote job creation and help those Americans who have lost their jobs and can't find new ones.

President Obama has declared that he will work to increase the minimum wage here in the U.S. to make sure that "full-time workers can earn a living wage that

allows them to raise their families and pay for basic needs such as food, transportation, and housing -- things so many people take for granted.”

The recovery of the economy, in the U.S. and globally, will take time and concerted effort. The United States remains concerned about the ongoing financial crisis and its impact on development. We are active domestically with our own economic stimulus plan, but we are also active internationally, through the G20 and through many ongoing bilateral discussions. At the UN, we look forward to the upcoming ECOSOC Spring Meeting with the Bretton Woods Institutions and the General Assembly’s meeting being planned to discuss the impacts of the crisis on development. These UN meetings provide a crucial opportunity to hear from the most vulnerable countries as to how they are being affected.

Madame Chair,

The U.S. has a record of fighting discrimination and social exclusion. We will continue to work to eliminate discrimination against marginalized groups, and to provide equal opportunities for individuals of all genders, all ages, all ethnic and racial origins, and all religious persuasions. We look forward to next year’s policy discussion on the topic of social integration, and will work with others in this body to craft effective recommendations.

At the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, then-Vice President Al Gore said that the “series of great UN global conferences represents an effort by the entire world to think through the principles and the practical requirements for the creation of [a better] world.” At this crucial juncture, we ask ourselves whether the world can return to the hope and idealism encapsulated in Copenhagen’s Social Summit. And I think we can all agree that the answer has to be: “Yes we can!”