

## Experts meet to discuss providing basic payments to everyone

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GENEVA (AP) \_ Governments should scrap existing welfare programs and provide every person in the world with a basic income to meet fundamental human needs, according to experts meeting under U.N. sponsorship here Thursday.

Under this system, everyone would receive such basic income \_ not just those with a demonstrated need, as in welfare programs. People with higher income would simply pay more income tax.

Such a system would be far simpler than existing welfare programs and would pay for itself because it would involve much less bureaucracy, argued Guy Standing, chairman of the Basic Income European Network, or BIEN, which organized a three\_day conference in Geneva.

Around 200 government advisers, academics and other experts from 28 countries are discussing the idea, which proponents say would improve economic security.

They say that everyone is entitled to enough income to cover minimum needs \_ food, housing, clothing, education and health care, regardless of race, gender or age. The exact level of the payment would vary from country to country.

"When we first introduced this, we were regarded as mad, bad and dangerous to know. But we are now welcomed by many policy\_makers," Standing told reporters.

Programs in the United States and elsewhere have shown that such payments can work, Standing said.

These include the Alaska Permanent Fund, introduced in 1976, that provides income to every resident of the largest U.S. state, and programs to provide money to women in Brazil and elsewhere provided their children go to school.

He also welcomed the introduction of a "baby bond" by the British government that puts money into trust when a child is born to provide it with income in adulthood.

The conference is being hosted by the International Labor Organization although the ILO \_ the U.N. labor agency \_ has no official position on the issue.

Among those speaking are the prime minister of Mozambique, Pascoal Mocumbi, and ILO Director\_General Juan Somavia.

Standing, who is also director of the ILO's socio\_economic security program, said the idea had long been rejected by governments as too expensive, but that many were now taking a closer look.

Despite evidence that such programs work, industrialized countries have increasingly been moving toward complex tests that can discourage the most deserving people from claiming their benefits.

That approach also can lead to "poverty traps," where claimants who find jobs are worse off because they lose benefits.

BIEN also criticizes "paternalistic" conditions, such as requiring the unemployed to report regularly to a welfare officer, prove that they are actively seeking jobs or take a job they do not want.

On the net:

<http://www.basicincome.org>