



THIRD ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Outcome of the Special Session of
the General Assembly of the United
Nations: World Summit for Social
Development and Beyond – Achieving
Social Development for All in a
Globalizing World**
(Geneva, 26-30 June 2000)

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I. Introduction

1. The 24th Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations – the “World Summit for Social Development and Beyond: Achieving Social Development for All in a Globalizing World” – was held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva from 26 June to 1 July 2000. The proposal for a Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in the year 2000 to conduct an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development had been put forward at the Summit itself and subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly.
2. The ILO delegation was led by the Director-General, and included a tripartite Governing Body delegation consisting of Ambassador Amorim, Chairperson of the Governing Body, Mr. Thüsing and Lord Brett. The Special Session was attended by some 2,000 members of delegations from 178 countries, representatives of 56 intergovernmental organizations, 1,200 participants representing 500 non-governmental organizations, 420 members of the media, and staff members of the United Nations and local staff.
3. Although some disappointment was expressed by certain groups – in particular some NGOs – as regards the outcome of the Special Session, its results have advanced the social development agenda, not only reaffirming the will and determination of the international community to implement the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, but also setting out further initiatives for its full implementation. The final document adopted by consensus on 1 July includes a political statement on the centrality of more equitable, socially just and people-centred societies; an assessment of what has happened since the World Summit for Social Development; and a wide array of initiatives.
4. In all, some 40 further initiatives and new international agreements for action were adopted by the Special Session. These included, for the first time, agreement on a global target for poverty reduction of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. The Special Session not only endorsed and encouraged the ongoing work of the United Nations system, but also succeeded in combining proposals for further initiatives with the political will necessary for their implementation. Bearing in mind that the Copenhagen Declaration stressed the need to create a framework to integrate economic, cultural and social policies and that the Programme of Action emphasized the importance of an integrated approach to implementation, real efforts were made during this event and its preparatory process not only to elaborate an integrated vision for social development, but also to operationalize that vision into a specific number of concrete and manageable initiatives. This outcome also responds to the call made by the ILO in its contribution to the preparatory process for a more coherent and integrated approach to policy-making.
5. It is particularly gratifying to note that a number of further initiatives adopted at the Special Session were based on proposals submitted by the ILO during the preparatory process. The ILO’s standards and principles are given due recognition in this text and the ILO’s concerns are well reflected in the overall document adopted by the Special Session. This text stresses the central role of employment and labour matters in combating poverty and exclusion, as well as the relevance of the ILO agenda for social and economic development. Of particular significance is the explicit endorsement of the ILO’s decent work programme and its four strategic objectives by the overall international community.
6. Apart from participating actively in negotiations at the Special Session, the ILO was also fully involved in the forum organized by the Swiss Government entitled “Geneva 2000: The next step in social development” which provided a platform for the exchange and sharing of experience through special events organized by governments, international

organizations, trade unions, business, non-governmental organizations, and other interested actors in the development process. In total, more than 6,000 people met in Geneva to take part in all the activities related to the Special Session.

II. Overview of activities and outcomes

1. Special Session

7. During the period 26-30 June, a general exchange of views on the implementation of the commitments made in Copenhagen was held in the plenary sittings. A total of 183 speakers took the floor, including 163 representatives of governments, 11 observers and nine non-governmental organizations. Statements from the opening session and the nine plenary sessions that followed can be found on the Internet.¹
8. As recommended by the Preparatory Committee, the Special Session established a Committee of the Whole. Following adoption of the proposed organization of work, delegates heard proposals for further initiatives from executive heads of agencies of the UN system and representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The Director-General addressed the Special Session on behalf of the ILO on 26 June. His statement can be found on the Internet.² He also chaired a high-level round table entitled “Promoting full employment”, one of three organized during the Special Session.
9. The Committee of the Whole decided to set up three working groups – one to examine and resolve the outstanding issues in Parts I (political declaration) and two to finalize Part III (further actions and initiatives) of the draft text. Part II (overall review and appraisal) of the document had already been agreed earlier in the year during the 38th Session of the UN Commission for Social Development. These working groups gathered in parallel to the general exchange of views in plenary sitting. The Committee of the Whole completed its work on 1 July and succeeded in reaching agreement on all the contentious issues within square brackets. At a concluding session in the afternoon, the final outcome document was formally adopted by consensus.³
10. The official text of the final document adopted by the UN General Assembly on 1 July is available on the Internet.⁴ Some of the main highlights of this text of particular interest to the ILO are briefly summarized in the following paragraphs. A summary such as this cannot, of course, do full justice to the comprehensive text adopted by the Special Session, which deserves to be read in its entirety.⁵
11. In the brief political declaration (Part I of the document), member States reaffirm the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action adopted in Copenhagen and reiterate their determination to eradicate poverty, promote full and productive employment

¹ <http://www.unog.ch/ga2000/socialsummit/speeches/speeches.htm>

² <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/dgo/speeches/somavia/2000/c+52606.htm>

³ Document A/S-24/Rev.1.

⁴ <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/geneva2000/index.html>

⁵ Document A/S-24/8/Rev.1.

and foster social integration. They stress that “globalization and continuing rapid technological advances offer unprecedented opportunities for social and economic development. At the same time, they continue to present serious challenges, including widespread financial crises, insecurity, poverty, exclusion and inequality within and among societies”. The text states that “unless the benefits of social and economic development are extended to all countries, a growing number of people in all countries and even entire regions will remain marginalized from the global economy”.

12. They consider the “full respect for fundamental principles and rights at work and the rights of migrant workers” as one of the “essential elements for the realization of social and people-centred sustainable development”, and reaffirm that “while social development is a national responsibility, it cannot be successfully achieved without the collective commitment and efforts of the international community”. The need to “find effective, equitable, development-oriented and durable solutions to the external debt and debt-servicing burdens of developing countries” is duly acknowledged, as well as the necessity to provide “opportunities for the acquisition of skills required in the knowledge-based economy”. The Special Session also recognized the “importance of strengthening partnerships, as appropriate, among the public sector, the private sector and other relevant actors of civil society”.
13. The political declaration also refers to the “severe threats to the health, peace, security and the well-being” caused by HIV/AIDS; to the reinforcement of solidarity with people living in poverty; to the specific attention to be given to Africa and the least developed countries; to the need to “work on a wide range of reforms for a strengthened and more stable international financial system” and of “a coordinated follow-up to all major conferences and summits”; and to member States’ strong commitment to “social development, including social justice for all in a globalizing world”.
14. The ILO’s concerns are well reflected in the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Commitments made in Copenhagen (Part II of the document). This review and appraisal shows that “many new national policies and programmes have been initiated”. However, “achieving the goals agreed upon at the Summit will require much stronger and more comprehensive action and new, innovative approaches”. The Special Session stressed that “since the Summit, globalization has presented new challenges for the fulfilment of the commitments made and the realization of the goals of the Summit” and recognized that there is a “need for collective action to anticipate and offset the negative social and economic consequences of globalization and to maximize its benefits for all members of society, including those with special needs”. Of the 13 targets adopted at the Social Summit of 1995, for nine the target date set was the year 2000, and available data indicate that “progress in these areas remains unsatisfactory”. In the view of the Special Session, “progress in eradicating poverty has been mixed. In many countries, the number of people living in poverty has increased since 1995”.
15. The Special Session recognized that “while the overall progress since the Summit in reducing unemployment has been slow and uneven, there has been increased attention [...] to the goal of full employment and to policies aimed at employment growth”. The delegates duly acknowledge the work carried out by the ILO since 1995, in particular the adoption of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). The Special Session stresses that “a growing number of people are afflicted by poverty because of the inequitable distribution of opportunities, resources, incomes and access to employment and to social services and that, in many countries, there is a growing schism between those in high-quality, well-paid employment and those in poorly remunerated, insecure jobs with low levels of social protection. Owing to continued discrimination and exclusion, women and girls face particular disadvantages in this regard”.

- 16.** The text also refers to the need to develop national and regional guidelines “taking into account broad definitions of productivity and efficiency in order to undertake comprehensive assessments of the social and economic costs of unemployment and poverty to facilitate appropriate strategies for employment generation and poverty eradication”; to the importance of education and of vocational and skills development training; to the “persistent discrimination against women in the labour market” and the fact that “women’s unpaid work remains unrecognized and unaccounted for in national accounts”; to the need to adopt a broad range of targeted policies for the protection of immigrants and migrant workers; to the increase in casual and informal employment since the Summit; to the need to integrate income support policies with active labour market policies; and to the contribution of social dialogue to social and economic development.
- 17.** The outcome document (Part III) contains a wide range of proposals for further action and initiatives, covering many fields of interest to the ILO. For the first time, the ILO’s decent work programme and its four strategic objectives have been endorsed by the overall international community. Member States also recognize the “need to elaborate a coherent and coordinated international strategy on employment” and support “the convening of a world employment forum by the ILO”. They undertake to support “continued efforts towards ratifying and fully implementing the ILO Conventions concerning basic workers’ rights”, “to respect, promote and realize the principles contained in the ILO Declaration” and commit themselves to “support and participate in the global campaign for the immediate elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including by promoting universal ratification and implementation of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention”. Member States stress the “need for close cooperation between the ILO, UNICEF, the World Bank and other relevant actors” in the fight against child labour. They “encourage the private sector to respect basic worker rights as reaffirmed in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work”. They also undertake to “consider the possibility of a major event on the informal sector in the year 2002, to be organized by the ILO”. The ILO’s role in addressing “a range of support measures to informal sector workers, including legal rights, social protection and credit” and the strengthening of “modalities of coverage of social protection systems to meet the needs of people engaged in flexible forms of employment” is highlighted.
- 18.** The ILO can, furthermore, be expected to assist national governments in other areas related to the goal of full employment, such as the reassessment of macroeconomic policies for greater employment generation and poverty reduction; the specific employment issues of youth; the creation of an enabling environment for social dialogue; the expansion of opportunities for productive employment “with a particular focus on small and medium-sized enterprises”; the promotion of gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination in the labour market; the protection of migrant workers; the devising and strengthening of social protection systems; and the strengthening of legislation or other mechanisms for determining minimum wages.
- 19.** ILO concerns are also reflected in agreements related to the “positive interaction among environmental, economic and social policies”; the institution of “systems for assessment and monitoring of the social impact of economic policies”; the undertaking of “comprehensive assessments of the social and economic costs of unemployment and poverty”; the reduction of “negative impacts of international financial turbulence on social and economic development” and the encouragement of corporate social responsibility.
- 20.** Delegates emphasized the clear link that exists between poverty reduction and employment creation, following in that regard the ILO’s approach as reflected in the contribution by the Director-General to the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee, entitled “Decent

work and poverty reduction in the global economy”.⁶ The document adopted calls for the full integration of employment growth and poverty reduction goals into macroeconomic policies; access for people living in poverty to skills training and microcredit schemes; the use of employment policies, including self-employment, to reduce poverty; the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises; the improvement of productivity and working conditions in the informal sector; the development of cooperatives; and the development of social protection systems for vulnerable, unprotected people.

21. Other further initiatives relevant to the ILO’s mandate and concerns include access to employment for persons with disabilities; the rights and protection of migrants; social integration in post-conflict situations; the contribution of indigenous peoples; the empowerment of women, including increasing women’s participation in the labour market; the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities; training in the skills and technologies necessary for the knowledge-based economy; HIV/AIDS; an assessment of the social impact of structural adjustment programmes; the generation of domestic revenue for social services; new and additional resources for social development; and the launch of a global campaign to eradicate poverty.

2. Geneva 2000 Forum

22. The ILO also fully participated in the Geneva 2000 Forum, organized by the Swiss authorities. Many of the 200 events organized were hosted at ILO headquarters, which witnessed an unprecedented flow of people and activities, and a lively programme of information and cultural events projecting the ILO’s message to the world. During the whole week the ILO opened its doors to all delegates and participants, who were able to familiarize themselves with the ILO’s work, contact ILO experts and access technical information and advice. Every ILO programme contributed fully, mobilizing innovative modes of outreach and communication.
23. The ILO itself organized a series of events as part of its contribution to the Forum. These included 16 workshops on a wide range of themes, which provided an opportunity for an open discussion on issues of critical importance for the ILO’s contribution to the implementation of the Copenhagen Programme of Action. They also represented a chance to discuss current developments affecting social progress and new initiatives that might be considered to further the Copenhagen agenda. Speakers and panellists participating in various workshops included eminent specialists, senior policy-makers from governments and multilateral agencies, representatives of workers’ and employers’ organizations, and activists from civil society institutions.⁷
24. The Director-General chaired one of the workshops, entitled: “Including the excluded in the world economy” and addressed a number of other events organized in the context of the Forum, in particular the high-level symposium on “Partnerships for social development in a globalizing world”, organized by the host country. He was a speaker in Panel I, entitled: “Ensuring decent work and living conditions”, where he addressed the issue of “a multilateral commitment to decent work”. Both in his capacity as Director-General of the ILO and as the initiator of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, Mr. Somavia participated actively in a series of seminars, press and public information events, official

⁶ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/gb/docs/gb277/pdf/esp-3-add1-a.pdf>

⁷ For further information, see the ILO website on the Special Session <http://www.ilo.org/geneva2000>

ceremonies, and meetings with parliamentarians, delegates and representatives of other international organizations, keeping a full schedule of activities to promote the ILO agenda. ILO representatives were also invited to participate as panellists and speakers in other events organized by various institutions.

25. A number of other initiatives were organized by the ILO. These included the provision of cyberspace facilities and the development of a CD-ROM, prepared jointly by the ILO and the United Nations, containing comprehensive documentation and information on the World Summit for Social Development follow-up activities and a review of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. Copies of the CD-ROM were made available to all participants. ILO information stands were permanently open in the ILO building and in other premises hosting the Geneva 2000 Forum, displaying documentation and multimedia packages.
26. Finally, the ILO joined efforts with the Swiss and Geneva authorities in the organization of a number of public events aimed at highlighting the plight of children working in abusive conditions and stimulating worldwide action to bring child labour to an end. The ILO organized a ceremony, with the participation of Mr. Pascal Couchepin, Swiss Federal Councillor, who, on behalf of the Swiss authorities, signed various ILO instruments including the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), in the presence of children from several countries who sang and released balloons as a sign of their solidarity with working children. In cooperation with the city of Geneva and the support of the Italian Government, a moving ceremony took place at the Victoria Hall, featuring a concert by children. Other activities co-organized by the ILO included a film festival on social development, video shows and an impressive exhibition illustrating the remarkable contribution made by the Brazilian city of Curitiba to environmental protection and social development.

III. Implications for the ILO

27. The outcome document provides strong support for the views and goals of the ILO. The ILO's concerns, standards and principles are given due recognition in the three parts of the document and many of its proposals for further initiatives have been endorsed by the Special Session. This satisfactory outcome is largely due to the Organization's heavy involvement in the preparations and to the fact that ILO constituents from all three groups played a very active part throughout the preparatory process and also at the Special Session itself. Most of all, it is due to the progressive recognition by the international community of the centrality of employment and labour matters in combating poverty and exclusion.
28. In endorsing the decent work agenda, the Special Session recognizes that one of the priority goals of the global economy should be to provide opportunities for all men and women to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The outcome of the Special Session reinforces the dimension of the ILO's global programme on decent work as a strategic means of creating employment, reducing poverty and promoting social integration and giving effect to a more integrated approach to economic and social policies in an increasingly integrated world economy.
29. Most of the initiatives that call for specific action from the ILO are already incorporated in the activities carried out within the Organization's regular programme of work. The overall programme of activities of the ILO for the years to come will provide the broad platform for its response to Copenhagen +5. The integrated approach called for by the Special Session will be channelled mainly through four mutually reinforcing axes:

- (i) The convening of a World Employment Forum in November 2001 – an initiative already adopted by the Governing Body and supported by the Special Session – will be of particular importance for the implementation of the outcome of the Special Session. The objective of holding the Forum was defined as “to review outstanding issues in the employment field and seek new and innovative approaches to the creation of more and better quality jobs, consistent with the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development”.⁸
 - (ii) Particular emphasis will be given to the recognition by the General Assembly of the international dimensions of employment and the need to elaborate a coherent and coordinated international strategy on employment. At the national level, the ILO will continue to assist countries at their request in formulating their strategies to attain the goals set by the Special Session. A further set of country employment policy reviews (CEPRs) in 2000-01 will provide a major input to the elaboration of the comprehensive employment framework to be discussed at the World Employment Forum.
 - (iii) The initiative launched by the Director-General to operationalize decent work at the country level will be key to implementing the ILO programme endorsed by the Special Session. This will be an integrated cross-sectoral exercise in selected countries, and an important new element in the Office-wide effort to advance the decent work agenda.
 - (iv) In emphasizing the strong link that exists between poverty reduction and employment, the Special Session called for a prominent role to be played by the ILO in addressing the concerns of the international community to reduce poverty through the implementation of the decent work agenda. The Office will pursue its efforts to ensure that the ILO’s strategic objectives are at the centre of national and international development and poverty reduction strategies. In that regard, the Office will pursue its collaboration with the World Bank in the implementation, at the national level, of the poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), focusing on the role of decent work in poverty reduction.
- 30.** The Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization will at its current session discuss a framework for studies on integrated policies to achieve a wider sharing of the benefits of globalization.⁹ The discussions of the Working Party will provide further elements for advancing the implementation of the integrated policy approach called for by the Special Session.
- 31.** The Special Session and its preparatory process provided an excellent example of how the different entities within the UN system can be mobilized to work together in support of a common goal – that of achieving social development for all in a globalizing world. Follow-up action on the Special Session will also require concerted and coordinated action by the entire system, and the ILO is willing to collaborate with the relevant organizations of the international system in this regard. An overall assessment of the outcome and follow-up on the Special Session was to be discussed by the executive heads of the UN system agencies at the Second Regular Session of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) (New York, 27-28 October 2000), and an inter-agency consultation was to be held on 1 November. The ILO is also expected to report on evaluation progress and implementing

⁸ Document GB.279/ESP/5.

⁹ Document GB.279/WP/SDG/3.

new initiatives, in order to allow the ECOSOC to fulfil its responsibility to “regularly assess, through the Commission for Social Development, the further implementation of the outcome of the Copenhagen Commitments and the outcome of the Special Session”.

32. *The Governing Body may wish:*

- (a) to welcome the adoption of the outcome document of the 24th Special Session of the General Assembly entitled “World Summit for Social Development and Beyond: Achieving Social Development for All in a Globalizing World”;*
- (b) to welcome, in particular, the recognition given by the Special Session to the role to be played by the ILO to further implement the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action;*
- (c) to request the Director-General to ensure that the implementation of the ILO’s programme of activities is closely geared to responding to the mandate conferred on the ILO by the Special Session, in cooperation, where appropriate, with other international organizations;*
- (d) to request the Director-General to report to the Governing Body in due course on progress made in the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and the 24th Special Session.*

Geneva, 25 October 2000.

Point for decision: Paragraph 32.