

**Civil Society Statement
presented to the UN Commission for Social Development
on 4 February 2009**

February 2009 marks two important events at the UN: the 47th Session of the UN Commission for Social Development (4-13 February 2009) with the theme of “Social Integration,” and the launch of the newly created World Day of Social Justice which, from now on, will be commemorated on February 20 of each year.

The Civil Society Statement, which was presented during the opening session of the UN Commission for Social Development on 4 February 2009, is a good example of how the NGO Committee for Social Development combines social justice and social development. The text of the Civil Society Statement was finalized during the Civil Society Forum on 3 February and follows below.

For more information about the UN Commission for Social Development, see www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/ . For more information about the NGO Committee for Social Development, see <http://ngosocdev.wordpress.com> .

47TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**SOCIAL INTEGRATION / INCLUSION:
TOWARDS SOCIETIES OF SOLIDARITY AND MUTUALITY
STATEMENT FROM THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM**

INTRODUCTION

In societies everywhere we find groups who are marginalised and vulnerable, especially women and children who bear the most severe consequences of social exclusion and conflict. Ethnic and religious minorities, persons affected by stigmatised illnesses including HIV and AIDS, migrants, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, youth and, more frequently today, older persons are among the groups who also experience increased vulnerability. People who struggle daily under the dehumanising conditions of poverty are unable to access power and denied the right to participate in creating the social order. From this perspective, social integration/inclusion has an ethical dimension which cannot be ignored.

Our primary concern, then, is social justice as a basis for social integration. The intrinsic dignity and rights of all human beings must be recognised, 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 been a strong reality check for all of us. It has highlighted how essential it is to have coherence and balance between economic and social development policies. Moreover, it 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 protection to ensure income security, pension 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 must respond to this reality. It 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. Indeed, social integration merits the central place given to it by the World Social Summit of 1995. However, we believe that the concept of social integration must be expanded to address current day realities. 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.

STRATEGIES FOR 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 strategies and effective practices to initiate the year’s dialogue on social integration / inclusion.

EDUCATION IS KEY

People of all ages have the right to universal quality education, which is a responsibility of governments. 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 empowers people to develop their full potential and defend their human rights.
- Education develops skills for employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, increased productivity, a reduction of social inequity and extreme poverty.

In addition, education should foster social integration/ inclusion by 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.

Effective practices

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 FOR PEOPLE-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT

Social integration/inclusion is impossible without systemic analysis to identify the root causes of marginalization and exclusion. Some symptoms of social exclusion which invite closer analysis if we are to identify the root causes are: forms of arbitrary discrimination, the gap between the rich and the poor, extremism, structural unemployment due to economic globalization, lack of social safety nets, violence, and environmental degradation. Systemic analysis, an essential step to the transformation of social and economic systems, should start with a consideration of minority needs. Such an analysis is most effective

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 and care for the environment. It must avoid the pitfalls of current development models which employ market-based economic frameworks that measure only bottom-line profit, often ignoring human and environmental costs. Instead, systemic solutions should lead to a solidarity or social economy. If we want to achieve social integration, we need a social model where all work is recognized and valued, including work that is informal and unpaid. Such social models which include decent work and sustainable practices and profit will support people in the protection 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

All who are affected by decisions should participate in their development, implementation and evaluation. This 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. A select group of nations is no longer a sufficient forum for discussion of economic challenges which clearly affect the entire globe. If we are to achieve social integration/inclusion, on-going deliberations must now include all nations and not only all nations but the interests of the peoples of all nations. This development reflects the overarching principle that “those affected by a decision need to be part of the discussion and search for solutions.” The economic meltdown demonstrated for us that any system which does not put people at the centre will find itself bankrupt in time.

Effective practices

The recent document produced by ATD Fourth World, “Turning Rhetoric into Action” 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 toolkit have already been used to prepare individuals living in poverty for participation in UN events.

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 have collaborated to obtain safe drinking water and improve basic hygiene. Facilitators helped residents to better their quality of life using existing organizational skills and indigenous values which emphasized consensus and community.

An example of creating a culture of inclusion beginning at the family and community level 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 can ensure their well-being and dignity. (www.kudumbashree.org ; www.ncnworld.org) The forums are small enough for the voices of the less powerful 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.

CONCLUSION

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 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.

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.

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 economic indicators, will give a more complete picture of social progress.

The challenge before us is to turn the forces of globalization to a new global ethic based on unity and diversity and the enjoyment of human rights for all. It is also an opportunity that must be seized. 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."