



## ***“A Renewed Social Contract: An Achievable Reality or an Unattainable Goal?”***

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### **Introduction**

Today, more than ever, our world is substantially and crucially fragile. Our society, our well-being, our future is threatened by structural inequalities and multiple layers of injustice. Our social contract - the solid foundations and norms that govern or must govern our interdependent societal relations, the rules that determine how we live together - has been broken. It has been broken, inter alia, by extreme poverty and hunger, intersectional discriminations, profound gaps in social protection, persistent and devastating gender inequalities and disparities, economic instability, the climate crisis, the widening digital divide. Today, we need to envision a different kind of world. We need new leadership. If we don't plan for a new future today, we won't have a future at all. We need to envision a new kind of society in which we live. We need a social system that takes a needs-based approach.

Worldwide, people and entire communities in developing and developed nations are made and kept poor in a variety of contexts. They lack access, not only to basic income and employment, but also to other human rights including low-cost nutritional food, water and sanitation, affordable and adequate housing, quality healthcare and care services, quality education and life-long learning skills, healthy and safe environment free from hazards and risks; all essential foundations of well-being and dignity that are captured in Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals. Violence against women and girls is at epidemic levels. The effects of climate change, global migration, the threat of nuclear war, the global cost of living crisis, the “care crisis” are all hindering social development. The COVID-19 pandemic, with severe economic and social impacts, only amplified the above pre-existing reality and systemic imbalances. The most affected people and groups, those that suffer the hardest, include among others women and

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children, youth, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees, migrants, persons with disabilities, those displaced by natural disasters, and those that are economically disadvantaged.

These structural challenges have made every effort for inclusive and resilient societies less effective, failing in essence to deliver a sustainable future for all. This is the time to rethink our whole approach to society and to accept and implement not just change but what amounts to a social revolution. The paper below presents the various demonstrations of the challenges pointing to the urgent necessity for a renewed social contract. It further explores potential solutions and policies needed to increase effectiveness and efficiency.

The process towards a renewed social contract will provide perspective, balance and regenerate momentum, forging a new vision and commitment 'to achieve a higher quality of life for all people.'<sup>1</sup> A multi-sectoral engagement by all, for all, with all, is necessary; one that commits to systemic and structural change, with human rights as its foundation, for the welfare of people and planet. Key participatory processes need to be established in order to listen to the needs with people living in poverty and devise respective solutions. We must motivate participation of all stakeholders including all levels of governments, international institutions, the private sector and civil society. The focus must be on placing justice and people at the center. We seek to rebalance relations between the state, society, markets and nature and seek transformative social policies and alternative economic approaches for the goal of social cohesion and planetary sustainability.

### **Contextual challenges: The data**

In the post-COVID-19 era, at the midpoint of our way to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals, it is clear that the global community is failing to live up to the commitments it had made in 2015. As we are in a post-COVID world, it needs to cure the virus of social injustice, inequality, marginalization, and environmental destruction. In its place it needs a new social contract and a new social dialogue to facilitate a movement towards that social contract. Multidimensional global challenges persist and threaten any progress achieved so far by people, communities and governments around the world. The list of data below is non-exhaustive and it only attempts to present certain scientific statistics which indicate the shortcomings of the current policies in achieving inclusive, resilient and equitable societies. Quality data is key to monitoring progress and informing policy responses.

- Extreme poverty persists and is even deepening in some parts of the world. According to the latest update of the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) with estimates for 110 countries, 1.1 billion out of 6.1 billion people live in acute multidimensional poverty.<sup>2</sup> Nearly two-thirds of all poor people (730 million people) live in middle-income countries. 35 per cent of all poor people reside in low-income countries. Over the past three years,

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<sup>1</sup> [Report of the World Summit for Social Development](#), Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995, Article 6, accessed on July 13, 2023

<sup>2</sup> ["Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023 - Unstacking global poverty: Data for high impact action"](#), United Nations Development Programme-Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 11 July 2023, accessed on August 3, 2023



poverty rates in poor countries have surged, with the number of additional individuals living on less than \$3.65-a-day reaching 165 million by 2023.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, women and children are more vulnerable to poverty. In 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau data had showed that, of the 38.1 million people living in poverty in the U.S.A, 56 percent were women.<sup>4</sup> Children comprise 50 percent of the extreme poor although they account for 30 percent of the world's population.<sup>5</sup> Indigenous peoples make up just over 6 percent of the world's population but account for almost a fifth of the world's poor.<sup>6</sup>

- The world is back at hunger levels not seen since 2005. As many as 783 million people faced hunger worldwide in 2022 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, repeated weather shocks and conflicts.<sup>7</sup> In addition to rising hunger, the capacity of people to access healthy diets also deteriorated across the world. More than 3.1 billion people globally were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021.<sup>8</sup> Food prices remain higher in more countries than in the period 2015–2019.<sup>9</sup>
- Persistent inequalities both between and within countries continue to be a fundamental challenge for universal health coverage. According to the World Health Organization, half of the world's population - up to 3.5 billion people – lack access to the health services they need, with almost 100 million people being pushed to extreme poverty each year because of out-of-pocket expenses.<sup>10</sup> Dramatically, the COVID-19 pandemic only intensified this reality, disproportionately impacting poor and vulnerable groups and worsening existing health and care disparities. Currently, only 45 percent of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit.<sup>11</sup>
- Furthermore, strong inequalities persist in access to education. In September 2022, UNESCO data showed that 244 million children and youth between the ages of 6 and 18 worldwide are still out of school.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, 130 million girls are denied the human right to education around the world.<sup>13</sup>
- Globally, 1.6 billion people worldwide lack adequate housing. UN-Habitat estimates that over 20 percent of the world's population lives in inadequate housing and that more than

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3 "[The Human Cost of Inaction: Poverty, Social Protection and Debt Servicing, 2020–2023](#)", UNDP, Development Futures Series, July 14, 2023, accessed on July 17, 2023

4 "[The Basic Facts About Women in Poverty](#)", August 3, 2020, accessed on September 30, 2021

5 "[Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty: An Update](#)", Poverty and Equity, World Bank-UNICEF, Discussion Paper, October 2020, accessed on September 30, 2021

6 "[Devastating rights violations against Indigenous people must end](#)", July 17, 2023, accessed on July 20, 2023

7 "[The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023](#)", FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2023, accessed on July 12, 2023

8 Ibid

9 "[The 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Report: Special edition](#)", accessed on July 22, 2023

10 "[Tracking Universal Health Coverage: 2017 Global Monitoring Report](#)", World Bank, WHO, 2017, accessed on August 1, 2023

11 "[Financing gaps in social protection: Global estimates and strategies for developing countries in light of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond](#)", Social Protection Spotlight, ILO Brief, September 17, 2020, accessed on July 12, 2023

12 "[244M children won't start the new school year](#)", UNESCO Press Release, September 1, 2022, accessed on August 1, 2023

13 "[The world is failing 130 million girls denied education: UN experts](#)", OHCHR Press Release, January 23, 2023, accessed on July 31, 2023



100 million people have no housing at all.<sup>14</sup> Due to discriminations and inequalities, many women and girls live in insecure, undignified and unsafe conditions, at increased risk of homelessness.

- Worldwide, 844 million people lack access to drinking water, and 2.3 billion do not have access to basic sanitation facilities.<sup>15</sup>
- In 2022, a third of the world, i.e. 2.7 billion people, did not have access to the internet and 53 percent of the world did not have access to high-speed broadband, demonstrating profoundly economic and social exclusion and inequality.<sup>16</sup> The GSMA's 2022 global gender gap study indicated that there were 264 million fewer women accessing the internet than men, with women 7 percent less likely to own a mobile phone.<sup>17</sup>
- To the above disheartening reality, we need to add the new climate 'normal' with extreme weather phenomena in increasingly frequent occurrence - like extended wildfires, record temperatures on land and in the sea, catastrophic floods after record heavy rains - impacting both developing and developed countries. It is worth pointing, for instance, that the global average temperature for July 2023 was the highest on record and likely for at least 120,000 years.<sup>18</sup>

It is well documented from above that even with the increased focus on social development and social justice since the World Social Summit in 1995, and its implementation with the focus on the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, poverty is on the rise, inequality is increasing, and the world is facing one crisis on top of another. Peoples' needs are changing in response to a quickly evolving context. People want more responsive action to address these key structural challenges.

A disconnected and fragmented approach to social, economic and environmental policies has not produced the desired results toward poverty eradication and reducing inequality. Profound social problems have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the failure of multilateralism and a growing distrust of institutions and governments, all factors that point toward the need to renew and recommit to a social contract. Establishing a renewed social contract entails integrating social, political, economic and environmental justice at both national and international levels. These are the pillars of international peace, prosperity and security, as it was stated in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> ["Global Homelessness Statistics"](#) Homeless World Cup, accessed on July 20, 2023

<sup>15</sup> ["Building access to clean water in support of Sustainable Development Goal 6"](#), UNICEF, February 2, 2023, accessed on August 3, 2023

<sup>16</sup> ["Fixing the global digital divide and digital access gap"](#), Landry Signé, Brookings, July 5, 2023, accessed on August 2, 2023

<sup>17</sup> ["The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022"](#), October 1, 2022, accessed on August 3, 2023

<sup>18</sup> ["It's official: July 2023 was the warmest on record"](#), UN News, August 8, 2023, accessed on August 10, 2023

<sup>19</sup> [Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development](#), A/CONF.166/9 Chapter I, Annex I para.5, World Summit for Social Development, 1995, accessed on August 1, 2023



## **Cross-cutting solutions that address the challenges**

Addressing the structural root causes of social injustice and exclusion requires a universal approach to social, economic and environmental policies in order to tackle the distinct challenges encountered by those left furthest behind, the marginalized and most disadvantaged people and groups of our society. Albeit it is recognized that these policies and respective approaches can be relevant and country-specific, a certain general framework of principles and guidance is required if we aim to re-create a fairer and more just global society. Governments need to realize that social inclusion is the fundamental element to a socially, economically, politically and environmentally sustainable future for all. In this context,

→ **Establishing nationally owned, human rights-based, and well-financed universal social protection systems and floors is essential for the 4 billion people who fall outside any existing coverage.**<sup>20</sup>

Social protection systems and floors are key in reducing inequalities. Social protection refers to a coherent social policy, ensuring people's access to basic services and social guarantees. Social protection systems include, inter alia, pensions for older adults, cash transfers and benefits for vulnerable groups, especially women and children, and provide support for working women on maternity leave, and for all workers through disability or job loss periods. Social protection floors are fundamental tools for alleviating the intergenerational persistence of poverty, escaping social exclusion and a major contributor to the realization of human rights for all, especially the most vulnerable.

Dramatically, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated income insecurity around the world, particularly for the more than half of the global population without any access to social protection. The pandemic has also contributed to increasing the financing gaps for social protection by at least 30 percent<sup>21</sup>; mainly due to the fact that governments were rather investing in mitigating the crisis' effects on health and economy while at the same time their revenues were falling due to lower growth and trade.

New sources of funding are necessary to finance social protection floors and systems both at the national and international levels. Progressive and improved tax systems domestically, as well as the establishment of a *Global Fund for Social Protection* with official development assistance, increased international cooperation and contributions from international financial institutions are key elements that can bring about social justice. Equality, non-discrimination, participation, as well as transparency and accountability are the key human rights principles that should guide the design and implementation of social protection policies.

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<sup>20</sup> ["Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions"](#), ILO UNDP UNICEF, September 2021, accessed on July 12, 2023

<sup>21</sup> Ibid



→ **Providing equal access to quality and affordable healthcare and care services for all is fundamental when aiming to build a healthy, sustainable and inclusive society.**

According to WHO, universal health coverage “means that all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. It covers the full continuum of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care”.<sup>22</sup> Health care is a human right and a public good. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that without equal and affordable access to health care for all, all of society is endangered. During the pandemic essential health services were severely and extensively disrupted. Inequities and financial hardship were exacerbated resulting in significant impact on people’s health.

Disadvantaged groups are more likely to experience hard financial consequences when paying for health services out of their own pockets. Governments need to design and implement policies and programmes that are human-centered and equity-oriented towards realizing universal health coverage. On a similar context, governments also need to recognize Care as a societal responsibility and a human right by adopting strategies to shift resources to respond to the growing need for child care and care for older persons and people with disabilities while acknowledging unpaid care work as valuable and essential work which benefits everyone and must be supported and more equitably distributed.

→ **Promoting policies that ensure equal access to quality and affordable education, life-long skills and training is essential when building a just society.**

Although literacy has been high on the development agenda over the past decades, data show that 750 million adults – two-thirds of whom are women – remain illiterate, lacking basic reading and writing skills.<sup>23</sup> The pandemic has further contributed to documented learning loss, teacher shortages, and a wider digital divide which demonstrated that remote learning was not a solution for many children living in poverty.

Transforming education is a prerequisite and a necessity if we want to create inclusive and truly learning societies. Education must be a global public good. Education must be highly valued in our society; it is often seen as an economic rather than a moral or social good. In a future socially just world, education needs to be valued for its own sake as well as for economic benefits it brings to society and the individual. We need education systems that are student-centered, creative, inclusive and equitable towards building essential skills and upskilling opportunities for lifelong learning. Education and training programs can prepare young people and adults not only to enter the labor market but also to become builders of the collective future we want. Education is central in empowering children and learners of all age, especially disadvantaged groups, to confront the complex challenges, to raise their earning potential, to

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22 [https://www.who.int/health-topics/universal-health-coverage#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/universal-health-coverage#tab=tab_1)

23 “Literacy Rates Continue to Rise from One Generation to the Next”, Fact Sheet No. 45 September 2017, UNESCO, accessed on August 3, 2023



foster a culture of sustainable development, civic responsibility, intolerance and human dignity of all and for all.

→ **Promoting policies that ensure digital technology is the new public good will transform and build a more sustainable society.**

Digitalization has opened new doors toward advancements around the world. It contributes to economic growth, it connects and brings people closer together, and enables better use of resources. However, many countries struggle to invest in digital technologies, innovation, and infrastructure mainly constrained by higher debt burdens or because they can't afford to finance it. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the use of digital technologies for work, commerce, education and connection, but at the same time created new inequalities. The "digital divide" refers not only to the distinction between those with access to the internet or mobile devices and those excluded from it, but also to the additional gaps, among others, in digital skills and training, digital use, and quality of infrastructure.

Governments must promote universal access to the internet as a fundamental right for all people and nations while providing digital training and affordable broadband internet service in urban and rural areas for all marginalized groups. Despite its extraordinary benefits, access to digital technology comes with many hazards and risks. In this digital age, for example, we must maximize children's and other users' online privacy, enacting regulations that promote digital responsibility. Digitalization must benefit all peoples. Governments need to also support technology transfer to developing countries while strengthening science cooperation and promoting sustainable global and domestic investments in infrastructure capabilities. A UN financing platform is necessary to address the "affordability" needs of people and nations.

→ **Ensuring equal access to affordable and quality housing is a key element in fostering social inclusion and creating a sustainable future for all.**

A home is one of the most basic human needs, without which a human being must live in precarious circumstances, on the streets, under bridges, in slums, or on public lands, in unprotected and unsafe makeshift structures, with limited rights and few means to fulfill their potential. The right to adequate housing means more than just a roof over one's head. Housing must be affordable, safe, secure, and protected from arbitrary eviction, with access to basic services (clean energy, water and sanitation) and available to all, free from discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion, age, or disability. Biased practices and policies disproportionately affect the most vulnerable and exacerbate the risk of homelessness. As a global society, we have abandoned and left behind innocent individuals and families through unjust housing policies. For instance, the financialization or commodification of housing has been forcing people and families into homelessness. Using housing as a vehicle for wealth and investment rather than a social good needs urgent attention.

Governments must create affordable and safe housing by enabling strategies such as accommodating tenures, payment flexibility for those with insecure income or in transitional





periods, and financial systems that extend credit to these vulnerable populations. Governments should also provide legal counsel to those faced with hardship and complex case issues. They must address or eliminate forced evictions and laws that criminalize or blacklist persons who are homeless. They need to mobilize governmental resources and call upon the corporate sector and civil society to work together to create stronger communities and an enabling environment to resolve systemic causes and personal drivers of homelessness. The best solution to homelessness is prevention. All people require the safety and security of a home to realize their potential and participate with dignity in society.

→ **Formalization of work and non-discriminatory livable wages are essential for productive employment and decent work<sup>24</sup> in a sustainable society.**

Work, employment, and livelihood have always been central to the social contract. Societies benefit when more people are productive and contribute to their country's growth. Productive employment and decent work are key elements to achieving poverty eradication and for ensuring that each individual contributes to and is able to benefit from a world that is ever more interdependent. So, too, are humane working conditions, equitable access to employment regardless of background, wages sufficient to meet basic needs, and basic social protections recognized as inextricable aspects of decent and dignified lives.

To promote decent work, there needs to be a comprehensive and integrated strategy cutting across a range of policy areas and involving a variety of stakeholders. Formalization of employment will be vital. Today, informal workers account for 60 percent of the global workforce.<sup>25</sup> Globally, 58 percent of women who work do so in the informal economy<sup>26</sup>. Policies should promote the protection and incorporation of workers, regardless of their household configuration, from the informal economy into the mainstream economy. Government institutions should create incentives for the private sector to commit to an essential duty: invest in fostering and releasing the talents of young people. We need to build dynamic, innovative and people-centered economies and labor markets that promote women's economic empowerment while addressing inequalities, work-related gender violence and the gender pay gap. Everyone deserves to feel respected at work. A workplace with dignity, with no violence and harassment for any reason for all workers of any gender, is fundamental and will ensure that all are valued for their achievements, abilities and qualities which can contribute to society.

→ **Including people with direct experience, in the design, implementation, and assessment of policy responses is fundamental for effective and impactful outcomes.**

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24 ILO defines decent work as "productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity" in "[Gender Equality and Decent Work Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations that promote Gender Equality as of 2012](#)", accessed on August 5, 2023

25 "[Five Things to Know about the Informal Economy](#)", IMF, July 28, 2021, accessed on August 4, 2023

26 "[Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Brief](#)", Florence Bonnet, Joann Vanek and Martha Chen, WIEGO, January 2019, accessed on August 4, 2023





Meaningful participation of people with direct experience of any kind - e.g. of homelessness, extreme poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, discrimination etc. - is key to developing effective policies, programmes and projects that overcome social exclusion. Non-participation in decision-making prevents progress in respecting and promoting human rights for all.

Community consultations, participatory workshops, inclusive and gender-sensitive decision-making processes, and the establishment of forums for discussion and feedback are needed. The indigenous communities, women and girls, older persons, homeless persons, persons with disabilities, the young and ethnic minorities, among others, need to participate in all policy-making processes. No one can be left out regardless of religion, national or ethnic origin, gender, age, or migratory status. Systematic evaluation of a full, genuine, and rights-based participation is essential, in order to share knowledge, experiences, skills and innovative approaches to public policy and governance at national, regional and global levels.

→ **Reforming existing global financial structures is key in addressing global economic inequalities based on solidarity.**

Recurring shocks and challenges, ranging from COVID-19 recovery and supply chain disruptions, to severe global inflation and widespread food insecurity, demonstrate one unavoidable reality: current global economic structures, regardless of the income level of a country, are not providing for the wellbeing of all. These are concerns that require global financial cooperation at far deeper and more meaningful levels, including around labor policies and structures.

Financing for development cannot be considered in isolation, it needs to be clearly linked to its main purpose: protection of basic human rights and eradication of poverty. The right to development needs to be the central focus of the process of financing for development, both nationally and globally. Nationally, states need to reform and establish fair, transparent and progressive tax systems, eliminating tax evasion and tax loopholes. Internationally, countries in the global North must deliver on their Official Development Aid (ODA) commitments, as well as recognize the fact that sovereign governments in the global South cannot prioritize debt servicing over meeting basic needs of their populations and sacrificing development.

It is essential to adopt a “whole society” approach in the formulation of national development plans which includes gender-sensitivity, accountability, transparency, management of misinformation and elimination of corruption in decisions. For instance, gender-responsive budgeting is essential in order to eliminate gender bias in public economic policies. Governments need to prioritize and measure the wellbeing of people and the planet, using multidimensional indicators, beyond GDP, in economic policy-making. We need to enact international trade rules that improve market access and foster development for the least developed countries. We must establish a multilateral system based on economic solidarity, respect of all human rights and of state sovereignty, that enables the global redistribution of power and wealth and leaves no one behind.



→ **Ensuring that all people have equal access to a healthy and safe environment and fair protection from environmental hazards and risks is fundamental in achieving a sustainable society.**

Climate change has caused the loss of livelihoods, housing and jobs, as well as parts of territories in some countries. Climate change is impacting, inter alia, public health, food and water security, peace and security. Vulnerable groups are hit the hardest having less means to cope and adapt. In many places, climate change has severely affected agriculture and resulted in food insecurity. Changing climatic conditions are also linked to internal and cross-border migration and exacerbated conflict over access to natural resources. Current climate policies have been proven insufficient to address the intense and frequent extreme weather events like heatwaves, catastrophic wildfires and floods. It is evident that sustainable development cannot be achieved without respective climate action.

We need to promote just transitions to a low emissions and sustainable economy, and equity in reaching global net zero emissions. Governments must provide equitable access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy, taking into account social and cultural factors. Environmental degradation on people's health and livelihood must be considered in all policy making. It is essential to establish meaningful participation of all marginalized people, especially women, youth, indigenous peoples, migrants and internally displaced persons, homeless, impoverished and persons with disabilities, in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws and policies and the development of the green economy and renewable sources of energy. Additionally, advancing indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories and resources is an effective way to protect critical ecosystems, waterways and biological diversity, and to include the right of women to own and inherit land. Governments must also strengthen people-centered institutions, at the national and international levels, to ensure they are accessible to all populations and are equipped to monitor, enforce and implement environmental law and environmental rights of current and future generations.

→ **Ensuring that all persons are equal before and under the law, and are entitled without discrimination to the equal protection and benefit of the law is fundamental for a just and fair society.**

Everyone has the right to be recognized as a person before the law. Rights enshrined in laws for almost 80 years remain unrealized for many; not only the right to development and the right to an adequate standard of living but also the right to political participation and legal protections. Data show that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide and that achieving gender parity in political life is far off. Discrimination and exclusion based on race or ethnic groups thwarts progress as well. Discrimination faced by disadvantaged individuals and households should be seen for what it is: a form of systemic discrimination that affects a range of areas including politics, health, education, housing and employment.

We need to take all appropriate measures to modify sociocultural patterns with a view to eliminating stigma, prejudices and stereotypes of all kinds and in all areas. Among others, we



need to adopt administrative and legal solutions to provide a legal identity for all, in particular universal birth registration. Cooperation and participation among every relevant stakeholder, including government agencies, civil society groups, local authorities, and individuals experiencing discrimination is the way forward.

## **Conclusion**

The values and commitments underpinning the World Summit for Social Development, held in March 1995 in Copenhagen, continue to be valid today and are more relevant than ever. Profound social problems and exclusion have been exacerbated by the effect of neo-liberal economics, the development of autocratic governments, the destructive impacts of climate change, the failure of multilateralism and a growing distrust of institutions and governments. Additionally, the global COVID-19 pandemic that the world endured in the last three years has dramatically exposed the systemic weaknesses of our social and economic systems. Furthering the spirit of the Copenhagen Declaration, in this midpoint to achieve the SDGs, it is urgent that we recognize and address the structural and intergenerational inequalities affecting millions of people's access to quality healthcare, housing, education and employment, among others. These fundamental human rights need to be realized through an intersectional approach of putting people at the center, to ensure that the dignity and wellbeing of all people and planet are protected.

The voices of people from the grassroots level, those who are made poor or kept poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, those left behind, must be heard and considered first by all stakeholders. The International Presentation Association, as a non-governmental organization present in twenty countries throughout six continents, advocates for their needs speaking and acting for global justice. At the UN, the International Presentation Association works together with like-minded NGOs and as an active member of the NGO Committee on Social Development engages in advocacy around social issues while ensuring that the rights of people and earth remain at the center of development. The NGO Committee on Social Development has been and continues to be a strong voice for the shared interest of all its members.

In this context, the Civil Society Forum, organized by the NGO Committee on Social Development in collaboration with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the UN Department of Economic Social Affairs, is considered a unique platform for the voice of NGO Committee on Social Development and its members to be heard. This Forum has been a space for members of civil society to gather, learn, discuss, and strategize on the themes and deliberations of the UN Commission for Social Development. The purpose of this space is to create an inclusive dialogue to strengthen cooperation between Member States, Civil Society, and the United Nations and to unify behind a common vision of furthering the Sustainable Development Goals, the principles of the Copenhagen Declaration, and the movement to renew the social contract. At a time of great inequality in the world, the NGO Committee on Social Development works with other stakeholders to accelerate action for a more equitable, just, and sustainable future while bringing a diversity of voices to the advocacy table and highlighting relevant good practices of its global membership.





One such good practice is the CHALLENGE TO CHANGE project<sup>27</sup> of the International Presentation



Association. The project is a development education project aimed at young people attending primary and post-primary Presentation schools in Ireland. Challenge to Change began over 20 years ago. It seeks to raise awareness, to bring about a greater understanding of global inequality and to allow young people see the impact of a changing global environment. What better way to bring about this learning than to ground the

Challenge to Change project in the SDGs, a living plan for the future that involves us all. Challenge to Change seeks to empower students by exploring ways in which their actions at local level can impinge for the better on issues such as injustice, human rights, fair trade, racism and exploitation.

It is evident that we all envision a world of true prosperity without poverty, of social inclusion and justice for all. As members of civil society, we support and work towards the vision of the UN Secretary General's Report titled "Our Common Agenda"<sup>28</sup> which calls for a second World Social Summit in 2025. The goals enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are ambitious. Achieving them at the pace needed will require entirely new patterns of relationships, interactions, and cooperation among governments, civil society, local communities, the private sector, and many other actors. All stakeholders need to work together to forge this transformative social contract anchored in human rights and fostered by participation and transparency that will strengthen trust between institutions, stakeholders and communities, and empower all members of society to be part of a social and political dialogue. Trust is fundamental in a global context where fear, mistrust and isolation are on the rise. Mechanisms for empowering all members of society are particularly vital in a period of growing inequalities, when economic and political power are increasingly concentrated in the hands of the few and human dignity is often a forgotten value of our world.

COVID-19 has shed new light to the extent to which we are bound to one another by our common vulnerability and our shared humanity. Only a new social contract will move us forward. It is not an unattainable goal. This can be an achievable reality. Progress has been made, but more needs to be achieved in the remaining seven years until the 2030 deadline. We can redesign a new social contract and build a more equitable, inclusive and just world if we work together in solidarity and partnership for a common good for our humanity and earth. All marginalized and vulnerable people need to be included in this social contract. One in which all solutions are shaped through a gender lens, so that inequality is a concept of the past not the future. Time is running out. We must act now to secure a sustainable future for all.

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<sup>27</sup> More information on this project can be found in the PraxisBonum database of good practices [here](#). PraxisBonum is the first global database on good practices, which provides an easily-searchable repository of projects, policies, and activities that have been effectively implemented in various areas at the local, national and international levels.

<sup>28</sup> In September 2021, responding to a request from the General Assembly in its UN75 declaration, the Secretary-General released his Our Common Agenda report. (It can be accessed here <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/>).