

**High-level Round Table 2 of the World Summit for Social Development
– Doha, Qatar on November 5, 2025**

Assessing progress and addressing gaps and challenges in the implementation of the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and its Programme of Action and giving momentum towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Social Development

Participant: Honourable Kirk D. M. Humphrey, Minister of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs

Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

The Copenhagen Declaration was a turning point in global development. It taught us that sustainable development, decent work and poverty reduction are not luxuries for a few but global public goods. It laid the foundation for the MDGs and the SDGs, and for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development itself. Yet thirty years later progress has been uneven. But what has been the Caribbean story?

First, on the pillar of eradicating poverty.

In the Caribbean, poverty declined from 53 percent in 1999 to 28 percent by 2019, but Covid 19 reversed many of those gains. Food insecurity now affects more than 17 percent of our people, and too many households that once escaped poverty have fallen back. For us, these are not statistics. They are neighbours, children, families. That is why Barbados is building stronger social protection systems, improving data, and introducing a Multidimensional Poverty Index to target support more effectively.

Second, on full employment and productive work.

The region's economies are recovering, but informality remains high and

decent work still uneven. In Barbados, we introduced a national minimum wage to protect workers and signal fairness across the labour market. We are also retraining and retooling our people, especially our youth, to participate fully in a digital and green economy.

Third, on social integration.

We are reforming our laws for the elderly, children and persons with disabilities, and bringing all of our social services together to improve efficiency and reach. We are also confronting the deeper social wounds, including violence, exclusion and the erosion of community, with programmes that rebuild meaning, belonging and care.

Beyond our shores, Barbados continues to lead through the Bridgetown Initiative, pushing for fairness in the global financial system, and through our National Resilience Fund, where citizens and government share the responsibility for building resilience.

As our President Dame Sandra Mason reminded us, Barbados has always stood in the vanguard of social justice and dignity for the poor and dispossessed. Our generation must do no less.

But we must also be honest. We have been at this crossroads before, a world divided between the strong who will do what they will and the weak who must suffer what they must. That thinking is re-emerging in new forms, and it is dangerous. It erodes solidarity, undermines peace, and weakens the very foundations of human development that Copenhagen sought to build.

This conference must remind us that strength should be measured not by dominance but by the capacity to lift others. If Copenhagen taught us to dream, then Doha must teach us to act together, in fairness, and in faith that a just world is still possible.

Thank you.