

Excellencies,

Distinguished Heads of Delegations,

Dear Secretary General Guterres,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address the Social Summit and express, from the outset, our appreciation to the United Nations and the State of Qatar for organizing such an important gathering.

My country, Albania, welcomes the holding of the Second World Summit for Social Development as a valuable opportunity to reaffirm our shared commitment to social justice, inclusion, and sustainable development.

Albania fully aligns with the Doha Political Declaration, which we have just adopted. We believe this Declaration can mark a new chapter in global solidarity. For Albania, it is an opportunity to reaffirm our faith in multilateralism and to strengthen our social contract at home.

Excellencies,

Thirty years after the Copenhagen Declaration, we meet again at a defining moment for humanity. The world has made undeniable progress; we are wealthier, healthier and better educated than 30 years ago. Yet, too many people remain excluded from the promise of development as the world faces growing inequalities, demographic transformations, climate disruptions, and technological divides.

For Albania, the Doha Summit is not merely a moment to look back on past commitments; it is a call to action for a new era of social justice and solidarity.

As a country in dynamic transition toward membership in the European Union, we see this Summit as a crucial platform to align our national social policies with global standards, strengthen social protection, and promote human-centered growth.

We strongly believe that economic progress must go hand in hand with social cohesion and equity. Social development is not a secondary goal; it is the foundation of democratic stability and sustainable prosperity.

Over the past decade, Albania has undergone a transformative journey. We have improved governance, expanded education and digital access, and achieved one of the highest levels of women's representation in government, placing Albania among the global top ten.

Yet, like many nations in transition, we continue to face structural challenges:

- a changing demographic landscape,
- ongoing poverty in rural and marginalized areas,
- and the need to modernize our social protection systems to respond to economic and environmental shocks.

That is why this Summit's vision resonates deeply with us. Over the past decade, we have aimed for inclusive growth, grounded in democracy, equality and solidarity. Our experience has shown us that social progress does not happen overnight. It requires consistent reforms, difficult choices, and most importantly, the trust and engagement of our citizens. In this regard, Albania stands ready to share lessons learned and to learn from others, as we collectively work towards a future of stronger social protections and inclusive growth.

Allow me to highlight a few areas where Albania has placed particular emphasis:

National Strategy for Development and Integration

The vision of Albania's National Strategy for Development and Integration is to create a modern, transparent, and efficient public administration that delivers high-quality services, supports sustainable economic growth, and strengthens democracy and the rule of law. It aims to align national development with European integration, ensuring better governance and improved quality of life for all citizens by innovating social protection and services.

We have reformed our health, education, employment and welfare systems to ensure greater access and fairness. The digitalization of public services has made state institutions more transparent and accessible to all citizens.

Our social protection program has improved the accessibility and equity of its social assistance programme and enhanced targeting of benefits to vulnerable populations, thereby reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion. In

addition, the introduction of EU policy frameworks and programmes, such as the Youth Guarantee and Child Guarantee initiatives, is instrumental in improving access to employment opportunities for young people and in addressing child poverty and social exclusion, aligning with the EU's objectives.

Albania's National Strategy on Jobs and Skills aims to build a competitive, inclusive, and sustainable labor market that promotes decent employment for all. It focuses on strengthening human capital through quality education, vocational training, and lifelong learning, ensuring that skills match labor market needs. This strategy envisions a dynamic economy in which individuals—especially youth, women, and vulnerable groups—have equal opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and career development, thereby contributing to Albania's social cohesion and European integration.

Albania's **National Social Protection Strategy 2024–2030** envisions a society where every person lives with dignity, inclusion, and equal opportunity. It aspires to break the cycle of poverty, empower individuals through resilient, child and gender-responsive support systems, and build communities grounded in care and solidarity. This strategy redefines social protection as a force for equity, human development, and shared prosperity for all generations.

This includes establishing a comprehensive legal and policy framework aligned with EU standards. Efforts have been made to expand and improve the quality of social services, ensuring that they are more accessible and responsive to the needs of the population. These efforts contribute to the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the social protection system.

Promotion of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

The UN has recognised Albania's strong commitment to promoting gender equality and social inclusion as part of our social protection strategy. Initiatives have been implemented to address the specific needs of women, children, and other marginalized groups, ensuring that social protection measures are inclusive and fair. These efforts contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to poverty reduction, health, education, and gender equality. Albania has made significant progress in advancing gender equality. Women hold prominent roles in politics, government, and the public sector. We are also working to

promote inclusion of marginalized communities, strengthening their access to opportunities and resources.

Regional cooperation

Located in the Western Balkans, Albania understands the importance of solidarity among neighbors. Our region has known hardship, but we have also seen how cooperation brings stability, growth, and social progress. We believe that regional dialogue and integration are essential to building social cohesion.

Albania advocates for climate-adaptive social protection and digital inclusion as integral parts of social policy.

Yet, we know that progress must never be taken for granted. Too many people, children, young, elderly, or marginalized, still face barriers to opportunity and dignity. As we navigate digital, demographic, and environmental transitions, social protection systems must evolve and adapt to meet new realities. Social development today cannot be separated from the great transitions of our time: digital, demographic, and environmental. We must bridge the digital divide, empower rural communities, and make social systems resilient to climate impacts.

We also believe that data, accountability, and partnerships must guide our follow-up after this Summit—so that our promises in Doha become measurable progress in people's lives. Because a nation's true strength is not measured by its wealth, but by the well-being, dignity, and equality of its people.

Let us make this Summit the turning point that places humanity back at the heart of development.

Thank you.