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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the
twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**priority theme: promoting empowerment of people
in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and
full employment and decent work for all**

Statement submitted by the International Council on Social Welfare, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The International Council on Social Welfare, an international non-governmental organization working to promote social development, social justice and social welfare worldwide, fully supports the decision of the Commission for Social Development to consider in depth the issues pertinent to the empowerment of people in achieving the three core goals of the World Summit for Social Development, namely, poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all. We see empowerment not as an abstract category but rather as one of the cross-cutting themes linked to ongoing practical efforts aimed at putting people at the centre of sustainable, equitable and inclusive socioeconomic development. We consider this discussion a welcome opportunity to reaffirm the commitments of the international community to a “leave no one behind” agenda and finding ways in translating this agenda into some tangible steps in the context of post-2015 development framework.

The “poverty challenge” remains on the world’s agenda as a political, socioeconomic and human rights issue. Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and is caused by many factors. Quite often, however, poverty is linked to the exclusion of people from the economic agenda when macroeconomic policy decisions are taken without properly evaluating their distributional and social impacts. People living in poverty, and particularly in extreme poverty, are marginalized by definition, enduring hardship and inability to get access even to minimum social services. Forced to face constraints in their life choices, they are often compelled to prioritize one basic necessity over the other. Integrating economic and social policies is essential for poverty reduction as well as for the promotion of growth.

The achievement of sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development remains of paramount importance. Structural changes in the economy aimed at halting the alarming pace of climate change and environmental degradation could open new solutions and new opportunities in the quest for sustainable patterns of consumption and production. We fully agree with the conclusion of the report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, entitled “A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development”, that “diversified economies, with equal opportunities for all, can unleash the dynamism that creates jobs and livelihoods, especially for young people and women”. We strongly believe that it is the responsibility of Governments, in cooperation with all partners and relevant stakeholders, to undertake proactive steps towards a green economy and ensure that social inclusion is firmly anchored to policy decisions.

Our experience on the ground in many regions of the world proves that empowering citizens and creating responsive, accountable Governments are two sides of the same coin. This interdependence is impossible without democracy and democratic societies that provide mechanisms for identifying rights that matter most to people, particularly marginalized groups. People want to participate fully in society, to have a voice of their own and have access to decision-making processes that affect them. Authorities at all levels should create space and facilitate dialogue with excluded groups on a wide range of issues, helping them to address inequalities, prevent discrimination and promote access to productive assets. A participatory approach to governance promotes the empowerment of people.

Member States have already resolved to put in place inclusive and transparent processes, recognizing in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, entitled “The future we want” (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex) that global development goals are a useful tool in focusing achievement of specific development gains as part of a broad development vision. Human rights commitments relevant to sustainable, inclusive development assumed a prominent role in the outcome document of the Conference. A human rights-based approach to monitoring commitments entails that people should be empowered to undertake monitoring while principles of non-discrimination and equality, along with other human rights principles, have been translated into policy action and enforced on the ground. To achieve the realization of all human rights for all, the post-2015 goals and targets will need to be embedded in a long-term framework for genuinely transformative change. Accountable and inclusive institutions are closely linked to democratic development, helping people to shape their life choices and demand accountability from elected officials.

An essential material prerequisite for the effective empowerment of people, however, is their social security. Only people who are socially secure, who are free of existential angst, who do not have to worry about securing enough income during the day, week or month ahead to buy food, shelter or health services for their children and themselves, are free to participate in the shaping of their lives and that of the community and society around them. Reiterating our long-standing commitment to social protection for all members of society, for both the formal and informal economy, the International Council on Social Welfare considers social protection to be an indispensable instrument for building resilience, achieving social security, including the eradication of poverty, and achieving equality, inclusion and cohesion. We deem social protection crucial to the achievement of equitable development and the promotion of social justice and empowerment. Global, national and local initiatives aimed at providing social protection floors for all citizens need to be encouraged.

A global fund for social protection, as proposed by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food and the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, would help to finance the setting up of social protection floors in countries too poor to finance the initial investment themselves. Accumulated experience and lessons learned, notably from the global South, where most of the recent innovations in social protection floors originate, should be used when designing more effective and efficient social protection schemes around the world. Together with more than 100 years of experience with social protection in industrialized countries, these innovations should be used as a basis to formulate an overall social protection goal for the post-2015 development agenda. We encourage a global dialogue on the role of social protection in sustainable development and the empowerment of people. There will be no empowerment of people without social security and no sustainable development without the participation of empowered people.