



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 November 2014

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-third session

4-13 February 2015

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world

Statement submitted by International Federation of Social Workers, 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 Federation of Social Workers is an organization that supports and promotes the social work profession through a social justice and human rights lens and models of best practice. Representing professional associations in 116 nations, the Federation supports the theme of “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world” for the fifty-third session of the Commission for Social Development.

Starting in 2010, the International Federation of Social Workers, along with its social work partners, the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Council on Social Welfare, developed the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development to address a number of issues related to social development and the social work profession. These issues are consonant with the theme of the Commission on Social Development outlined herein.

Challenges

In its Global Agenda document, the International Federation of Social Workers and its partners highlighted a number of past and present challenges that have had negative impacts on people, specifically:

(a) The full range of human rights is available to only a minority of the world’s population;

(b) Unjust and poorly regulated economic systems, driven by unaccountable market forces, together with non-compliance with international labour standards and inadequate corporate social responsibility, have damaged the health and well-being of peoples and communities, causing poverty and increasing inequality;

(c) Cultural diversity and the right to self-expression, which facilitate a more satisfying intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence, are in danger owing to aspects of globalization that standardize and marginalize peoples, with especially damaging consequences for indigenous and First Nations peoples;

(d) Dominant economic, political, social and religious forces are eroding the communities in which people live and the supportive relationships in which they thrive, particularly in war-torn areas;

(e) People’s health and well-being suffer as a result of inequalities and unsustainable environments related to climate change, pollutants, war, natural disasters and violence, to which there are inadequate international responses.

Consequently, the International Federation of Social Workers and its partner organizations have identified four priority areas to be addressed over the next four years, each of which corresponds to an area of work in social development:

(a) Promoting social and economic equality with a focus on the post-2015 development agenda, which includes, for example, the social protection floor initiative, decent work and international labour standards, the World Health Organization initiative on the social determinants of health, and education for all;

(b) Promoting the dignity and worth of peoples by advocating social strategies that build cohesive societies and remove the seeds of conflict, Working to challenge violent State responses to actions carried out by people in defence of their

rights, advocating for the right of people to move within and between countries and for the right of documented and undocumented migrants to have access to social services;

(c) Working towards environmental sustainability by focusing on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the World Urban Forum and the post-2015 development agenda, with particular attention to disaster prevention and management;

(d) Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships by drawing attention to the importance of sustainable, interdependent communities in achieving social development and well-being, and advocating methodologies that support community empowerment.

Lessons learned

With regard to the first priority area identified above, the International Federation of Social Workers and its partner organizations, in the document entitled “Global agenda for social work and social development: first report — promoting social and economic equalities”, detailed what has been learned from the growing social and economic crisis in terms of inequality. Several lessons drawn from social work practice around the world were shared in the report, including the following:

(a) People cannot be developed by others: Front-line experience has taught us that, to escape poverty and oppressive situations, people need to be actively involved in their own futures;

(b) The cornerstone of a thriving economy is a stable, well-resourced and educated community. All too often, Governments argue that they cannot afford to invest in the community, whereas our front-line experience has informed us that investing in the community stimulates entrepreneurship, skills development, cultural innovation and business growth and widens opportunities for young people, men and women;

(c) People are happier and greater well-being in more equitable societies. Massively unequal distribution of wealth causes more social instability, health and crime problems, negatively affecting everyone;

(d) When people have a collective voice, they are better able to advocate for their rights and participate in decision-making processes, resulting in greater well-being.

Summary and recommendations

Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world requires flexibility, creativity and new ways of looking at old patterns. It is no longer acceptable to stick with old methods and ways of working. Development must encourage and embrace beliefs and behaviours that ensure that all voices are heard and are part of the process of development at all levels.

The Federation’s recommendations include the following:

(a) Governments and non-governmental organizations should work in collaboration with others for the development of strong local communities that promote the sustainable social well-being of all their members. The focus of these

efforts should be to strengthen the capacity of communities to work with their Governments to extend social and economic development. It is imperative that communities be involved in planning and developing their own futures;

(b) There should be universal implementation of the international conventions and human rights instruments on social, economic, cultural and political rights for all peoples, including, among others, the rights of children, older people, women, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples, and an end to discrimination on the grounds of race and sexual orientation;

(c) Governments and non-governmental organizations should work in collaboration with others to promote strong and inclusive communities that enable all members to participate. Policies should be promoted that are aimed at social integration and cohesion as a means for achieving the economic and social well-being of all persons, including older people and persons with disabilities, mental health needs and/or learning difficulties. When people within these communities have a collective voice, they will be able and willing to participate in the decision-making process, which, in turn, will result in greater well-being for all.
