

## UN Commission for Social Development, 4-13 February 2015

### Statement by Ireland

Madam Chair,

Ireland aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union and wishes to add some remarks in its national capacity.

At the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, 20 years ago, employment and decent work were considered to be both goals and means to combat poverty and promote social integration. We agreed with that then, and we agree with it now.

Madam Chair,

Ireland is emerging from a serious economic crisis that has challenged how our state and our economic system operate. We believe we are emerging as a stronger and more resilient country. In building our social recovery from the economic crisis, we are mindful of the Copenhagen outcome and it is our conviction that the strongest protection against poverty is decent, secure and fairly paid work.

For this reason the Irish Government introduced the *Pathways to Work* strategy and the *Action Plan for Jobs*. I am glad to be able to say that these measures are working and from a peak of unemployment three years ago, we have created jobs for 9 successive quarters and reduced the unemployment rate from a peak of over 15% to 10.5%. Reducing this level further and giving all of our citizens the opportunity of meaningful work continues to be a top priority for Ireland.

As the economy continues its recovery, Ireland is doing its utmost to ensure the benefits are felt by every person and every community across the country. In that regard, we are

commencing a new cycle of investment in public services, because quality public services are also essential to reducing inequality.

Furthermore, our *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016* sets out a wide ranging and comprehensive programme of action to tackle poverty and social exclusion in Ireland. The Government's ambition for reducing poverty is set out in the national social target for poverty reduction, which in turn is aligned with the Europe 2020 poverty target.

Madam Chair,

We strongly believe that the same principle should apply at the international level. In the aftermath of the global economic crisis, many Member States have learnt that economic growth alone, while important, is not sufficient to achieve resilient and inclusive societies.

In rethinking and retooling social development, Member States and the Commission for Social Development should address the challenge of making sure that this lesson is not forgotten and that the international community does not make the same mistake again of over-relying on the capacity of markets to bring about inclusion and social justice.

States should avoid a situation where growing inequality across and within countries is overlooked in the pursuit of economic recovery. It is not something to be tackled later. We believe that, as employers see the benefits of the recovery, so too should their employees.

However, we note with concern that in his report, the Secretary General's states that "*persistent long-term unemployment since the crisis stands in contrast to the gradual global and economic recovery and continues to raise fears of a jobless recovery*". Moreover, he notes that "*the wage gap between top and bottom earners has increased in most countries*". These problems are at the core of the complex relationship between social and economic

development and are one of the contemporary challenges faced by social development. Cooperative ways to tackle these issues should be at the centre of today's discussion.

As part of our approach to this issue, Ireland published last April, its first National Plan on Corporate Social Responsibility entitled "*Good for Business, Good for the Community*". The Plan, which was prepared by our Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation on behalf of the Government, highlights the potential which CSR can play in improving the competitiveness of companies and other organisations, while at the same time bringing benefits to the wider community through various social, economic and environmental initiatives.

The overarching objective of our National Plan on CSR is the adoption and implementation of best practice in CSR in enterprises and organisations in Ireland to the extent that we will be recognised internationally as a Centre of Excellence for responsible and sustainable business practice.

Madam Chair,

Ireland believes that development – whether at home or abroad - cannot be sustainable unless it is inclusive and tackles all three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental.

Just last month, Ireland adopted a major review of our external engagement titled: *The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World*". This foreign policy is deeply anchored in the values set out in our Constitution. These same values are reflected also in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the principles which underpin the European Union. Fundamentally, we believe that a fairer world cannot be achieved without peace and security, without justice and human rights and without sustainable policies and actions on the environment, social priorities and the global economy. These challenges are interconnected and

require solutions that are also interconnected. What is required is for all members of the international community to take on our collective responsibility for our shared future.

For our part, our approach to development cooperation is based on building and sustaining strong partnerships to address the complex factors behind poverty, hunger and inequality.

In relation to trade and economic growth, Ireland's development cooperation policy, *One World One Future* commits us to ensuring that economic development, including the international engagement by Irish companies, is compatible with Ireland's commitment to human rights, gender equality, decent work and the rights of marginalised groups. In doing so, we are, guided by the UN policy framework for better managing business and human rights challenges. We are currently developing a new National Plan on Business and Human Rights which will implement the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

These principles state that governments have the duty to protect human rights, companies have a responsibility to respect those rights, and both governments and companies must work to provide a remedy when violations occur. Ireland is currently seeking consultation with interested individuals and groups, both Irish and international to ensure we develop the best possible approach.

In our work with development partners abroad, we maintain the same values as we do at home and promote the inclusion of job creation objectives in the national plans, poverty reduction frameworks and budgets of our Key Partner Countries.

Our focus is on ensuring the poorest benefit from economic growth, and we believe that social protection mechanisms can have an important role to play here. We work to address inequalities, in particular gender inequality, across our development programme especially by

focusing on countering barriers to women's participation, on promoting gender mainstreaming, and on strengthening the voice and role of civil society and local communities.

Madam Chair,

We believe that a strong civil society voice is at the centre of sustainable development, in all of its three dimensions: social, economic, and environmental.

In empowering women and youth, persons belonging to minorities and to vulnerable groups, in advancing social justice, and in its contribution to realization of all human rights, civil society greatly contributes to tackling inequalities and enhances social inclusion.

In thinking about and indeed in rethinking, social development, all States should recognise this important contribution and create and maintain a safe and enabling space for civil society.

Madam Chair, last week the Secretary General told us in this room that 2015 must be a year of global action. We agree, and recognise that 2015 is a pivotal year in international development. This year we have the responsibility and opportunity to negotiate a new global framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals, to identify and agree how best to finance development and to conclude a legally-binding agreement on climate change.

Ireland's ambition is to achieve a transformative shift to sustainable development goals, including a commitment to end extreme poverty and hunger by 2030. This will require sustained effort and commitment from all of us. Let me assure you, Madam Chair, that Ireland, both nationally and in our role as co-facilitator of the inter-governmental negotiations on the SDGs will spare no effort in reaching the best possible agreements this year.