

**Statement by H.E. Ms. Sylvie Lucas, President of Economic and Social Council
Commission for Social Development
47th session
4 February 2009**

Madame Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your invitation to address the opening of the forty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development.

As you know, the Economic and Social Council is entrusted with coordination, policy review and overall guidance on economic and social issues. It has the challenging task to advance the United Nations development agenda, a task that could not be accomplished without the support of its functional commissions.

The Commission for Social Development has a unique role in assisting in the implementation of that agenda by promoting the implementation of commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 and its subsequent reviews.

At Copenhagen world leaders affirmed that “in both economic and social terms, the most productive policies and investments are those that empower people to maximize their capacities, resources and opportunities.”

Over the years, this Commission has put forward a broad perspective on development based on this very assumption; a perspective that goes beyond economic considerations and puts people at the centre of development.

Putting people first is certainly an underlying premise of this session’s priority theme : promoting social integration.

In turn, putting social integration, social inclusion, high on the development agenda, as envisioned by the World Social Summit should be our priority.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slowing growth in the global economy and a deepening financial crisis have already resulted in the increase of the number of working poor, growing numbers of unemployed and under-employed, deepening of income inequalities and pushing more people into poverty.

In fact, the current global financial, food and energy crises as well as climate change are not only jeopardizing the development gains we have made so far, but are actually forcing us to expand our focus from lifting people out of poverty to also include preventing people from falling into poverty by expanding social protection systems.

Poverty itself is a form of social exclusion. It deprives people of the opportunity to benefit from and contribute to the society they live in. Long-term exclusion not only hinders development but may lead to civil disorder, instability or open conflict.

Exclusion extends to social, economic, political and cultural realms and requires concerted action in all those areas.

Like many other social expenditures, investment in public health is a sectoral issue requiring intervention at many levels and its importance for social inclusion cannot be overstated.

Recognizing the importance of investment in primary healthcare, ECOSOC's 2009 Annual Ministerial Review will focus this year on "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health". In this context, the Council will pay great importance to the "social determinants of health" as the factors of a major part of health inequities. According to the Commission established by the World Health Organization on these matters, these determinants include the distribution of power, income, goods and services and the circumstances of people's lives, such as their access to health care, schools and education, leisure and cultural opportunities, their conditions of work, as well as the state of their housing and the environment. Health is therefore related to a variety of factors.

Another area of engagement for ECOSOC, where the social inclusion perspective is especially important is its assistance to the work of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Since exclusion, discrimination and inequality often lie at the root of various social and political conflicts and tensions, policies addressing them are vital for successful peace-building efforts. In addition, consented efforts should be made to reintegrate ex-combatants, including child soldiers into society and build inclusive public institutions.

ECOSOC helps moreover to promote inclusiveness at a global level through its Development Cooperation Forum. The Forum has an important role to face the emerging challenges to the development community and promote global dialogue and coherence in global development cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Commission has an important task of guiding our efforts at fighting exclusion and promoting socially inclusive policies that put people at the centre of development.

Effective social integration policies can help us prevent conflict, encourage dialogue, manage coexistence and the way we exploit our natural resources.

We need such integrative and inclusive policies to face the challenges of today and tomorrow.

I am convinced that your deliberations will guide us on how to eliminate diverse forms of exclusion and advance development for all.

I wish you a very productive and successful forty-seventh session.

Thank you.