

Ministerial Declaration-1999

“Ministerial communiqué of the high-level segment submitted by the President of the Council”

“We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations participating in the high-level policy dialogue and the high-level segment of the 1999 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, held from 5 to 7 July 1999, having considered the theme “The role of employment and work in poverty eradication: the empowerment and advancement of women”, have adopted the following communiqué:

1. We recognize that there is a wide consensus that productive employment plays a central role in poverty eradication. At the same time, we recognize that in many cases women and men suffer poverty or become impoverished for different reasons and through different processes and face different opportunities and constraints in coping with poverty and in accessing labour markets and sustainable livelihoods. The mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all policies aimed at poverty eradication and employment creation, including through gender impact analysis, is all the more crucial as women constitute the majority of people living in poverty. Therefore, we undertake to adopt effective poverty eradication strategies which address employment creation and gender-specific policies. Combating gender inequalities is central to successful poverty eradication efforts and must include the establishment and implementation of policies aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.

2. We reaffirm the commitment we made at the World Summit for Social Development to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind and to promote the goal of full employment as a basic priority of our economic and social policies, and to enable all men and women to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods through freely chosen productive employment and work. We also reaffirm that, as set forth at the Fourth World Conference on Women, we are determined to promote women’s economic independence, including employment, and to eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women by addressing the structural causes of poverty through changes in economic structures, ensuring equal access for all women, including those in rural areas, as vital development agents, to productive resources, opportunities and public services.

3. Strategies to eradicate poverty, promote productive employment and achieve gender equality must be designed to address the conditions and needs of women and men on equal and equitable terms. They should be comprehensive in their approach, while allowing for the flexible use of policy instruments in accordance with specific national and sectoral conditions, including those in the rural sectors, and should be pursued, as appropriate, at the national and international level with a particular focus on:

(a) The need to promote dynamic, sustained and human-centred economic growth and development in a manner that generates employment;

- (b) The need to aim at improving market outcomes for all people living in poverty, especially women and vulnerable groups;
- (c) The development of public policies to provide an enabling environment for the efficient functioning of markets while promoting equality and social protection;
- (d) The promotion of women's equal participation with men in the planning, decision-making and implementation of strategies.

4. In a broader perspective, strategies to eradicate poverty, promote productive employment and achieve gender equality should be supported by an enabling international environment by taking action, *inter alia*:

- (a) To undertake measures aimed at the effective mobilization of financial resources for development;
- (b) To call upon developed countries to strengthen their efforts to achieve, as soon as possible, the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for overall official development assistance and, where agreed, within that target to earmark 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of gross national product for the least developed countries;
- (c) To encourage appropriate technology transfer and support capacity building for developing countries and countries with economies in transition;
- (d) To promote international cooperation aimed at sustained economic growth, stable markets and job creation;
- (e) To reinforce conditions for a more favourable climate for international trade;
- (f) To increase investment in developing countries and in countries with economies in transition.

5. Empowerment of people, in particular the empowerment of women, is a prerequisite of effective poverty eradication and employment creation strategies. All States parties should fully implement their obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women² and other international human rights instruments.

6. Democracy, the rule of law and the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, are important prerequisites of an effective poverty eradication and employment creation strategy. In the field of employment and work, the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions as well as the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work³ provide a realistic framework. Participatory mechanisms, including tripartite forms of social dialogue among Governments, and workers' and employers' organizations, can facilitate policy-making. The involvement of women's organizations in participatory mechanisms and the role of women within relevant organizations should be emphasized to ensure that women's voices are heard in deciding policies on employment and work. Furthermore, women should fully participate in labour unions.

7. Employment growth has an impact on poverty reduction. Depending on specific national conditions and levels of development, an effective development strategy could include targeting key economic sectors for employment-intensive growth, including agriculture and non-traditional sectors. Employment growth should be associated with

wages that yield incomes above the poverty line and with a significant reduction of underemployment, disguised unemployment and under-remunerated work among women and men at the same time. It is equally important that women and men directly control the use of the wages they earn.

8. An increasing number of women as compared with men are living in poverty. The causes of this feminization of poverty are multiple. Women derive less benefit from employment because they continue to encounter discrimination in many areas, such as wage discrimination, occupational segregation, differential treatment in social protection and lack of opportunities in education and training. Women's historically greater share of responsibility for family well-being and their role as child-bearers are also factors that contribute to discrimination against women in the paid labour market. Therefore, we call for targeted policies and strategies aimed at empowerment of women including promulgation and enforcement of anti-discrimination and non-discriminatory legislation and equal employment opportunity policies and promotion of access to affordable, quality childcare services and, as appropriate, ways to assist with other family-caring responsibilities. A proactive gender policy requires equal access by girls and women to education and training, removal of wage differentials both through legislation and in practice, to guarantee the right of men and women to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, and equal access to high-level and decision-making occupations. We also call for increased efforts to reduce the gap in unemployment rates between women and men, including through job creation policies.

9. In all countries, and in particular in many developing countries and countries with economies in transition, strategies for stimulating the development of small and medium-sized enterprises as well as other forms of self-employment, including through entrepreneurial training, especially for women can encourage employment creation and lead to poverty eradication.

10. In recognition of the role of microcredit in poverty eradication, empowerment of women and employment generation, we encourage the strengthening of existing and emerging microcredit institutions and their capacities, including through the support of international financial institutions, so that credit and related services for self-employment and income-generating activities may be made available to an increasing number of people living in poverty, in particular women, and to further develop, where appropriate, other microfinance instruments.

11. The emergence of non-standard forms of work may offer more flexible hours and greater compatibility with family responsibilities but may often entail lower levels of social security coverage and employment rights, lower wages, and limited career prospects. We recognize the need for appropriate employment security, as far as possible, for women and men workers who are engaged in part-time, contract, seasonal or temporary work, and social protection for those engaged outside the formal sectors. We recognize the need to ensure that such types of work are not sub-standard in terms of working conditions, social protection and protection against unfair dismissal. We acknowledge the need to address the contribution of women to the economy,

both their unremunerated and remunerated work. We need also to address the conditions of those working at home.

12. We note the large numbers of women from developing countries and some countries with economies in transition who continue to venture forth to more affluent countries in search of a living for themselves and their families as a consequence of poverty, unemployment and other socio-economic conditions, and acknowledge the duty of sending States to work for conditions that provide employment and security to their citizens. A number of women migrant workers have been subjected to violence and victimized by traffickers for purposes of commercial and sexual exploitation through prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation. We recognize the need to promote and protect the rights and welfare of all migrants and encourage member States to consider acceding to and ratifying the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families⁴, as well as the Slavery Convention of 1926.⁵ We also invite concerned member States to consider adopting appropriate legal measures against intermediaries who deliberately encourage the clandestine movement of workers and who exploit women migrant workers.

13. We encourage member States to adopt and/or implement legislation to ensure the elimination of violence against women, emphasizing the prevention of violence and the prosecution of offenders, and to take measures to ensure the protection of women subjected to violence, and their access to just and effective remedies, including compensation, indemnification and healing.

14. In many countries, especially developing countries and countries with economies in transition, the informal sector generates employment and serves as a buffer against unemployment and poverty, particularly in times of economic crisis. However, employment in the informal sector is characterized by low levels of productivity and income. As one possible policy approach for the informal sector, these shortcomings could be addressed through the improvement of access for those living in poverty, especially women and vulnerable groups, to credit, especially microcredit, training, technology and marketing techniques, while efforts continued to incorporate the informal sector as much as possible into the formal economy, as appropriate.

15. Employment policies should focus on gender sensitive labour policies that strengthen the interrelation among education, training, employment promotion, and social protection policies, taking into consideration a life cycle approach. We also recommend that public policies avoid reduction of expenditure on health, education and skill development that benefits the people living in poverty and those most in need under conditions of budgetary constraints. We recommend the further promotion and implementation of the 20/20 initiative in interested countries with a view to bolstering policies and resource allocation in these decisive areas.

16. We welcome the adoption of the ILO Convention (No. 182) concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, adopted by the International Labour Conference at its eighty-seventh session,

Geneva, 17 June 1999. We reiterate our call upon all States to translate into concrete action their commitment to the progressive and effective elimination of child labour contrary to accepted international standards, and urge them, as a matter of priority, to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, such as forced labour, bonded labour and other forms of slavery.

17. Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications are necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision making in society. Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic return, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable.

18. The international community has a key role to play in supporting efforts to eradicate poverty, promote productive employment and achieve gender equality. In this regard, the mobilization of new and additional financial resources from all sources, national and international, is required. Furthermore, debt relief under the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative should strive to achieve faster, deeper and broader debt relief to eliminate unsustainable debt burdens for the poorest countries. Such an initiative, along with other efforts towards the solution of the debt problem, can promote greater investment in poverty eradication and employment policies with specific regard to gender equality.

19. We call upon the relevant organizations of the United Nations system to take consistent, coherent, coordinated and joint actions in support of national efforts to eradicate poverty, with particular attention to employment creation and work and the empowerment and advancement of women. We also request them, and especially the United Nations funds and programmes and specialized agencies, to translate the recommendations of the present communiqué into concrete actions and request the Secretary General to submit a progress report to the Council at its substantive session of 2000.

Notes

1 *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1999, Supplement No. 13.*

2 General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.

3 See *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up Adopted by the International Labour Conference at its Eighty-sixth Session, Geneva, 18 June 1998* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 1998).

4 General Assembly resolution 45/158, annex.

5 *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments, Volume I (First Part), Universal Instruments* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.XIV.1) (Vol. I, Part 1), sect. 6.28.