

## DEAR CITIZENS

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*«We acknowledge that it is the primary responsibility of States to attain these goals. We also acknowledge that these goals cannot be achieved by States alone. The international community, the United Nations, the multilateral financial institutions, all regional organizations and local authorities, and all actors of civil society need to positively contribute their own share of efforts and resources in order to reduce inequalities among people and narrow the gap between developed and developing countries in a global effort to reduce social tensions, and to create greater social and economic stability and security. Radical political, social and economic changes in the countries with economies in transition have been accompanied by a deterioration in their economic and social situation. We invite all people to express their personal commitment to enhancing the human condition through concrete actions in their own fields of activities and through assuming specific civic responsibilities»*

COPENHAGEN DECLARATION ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

*It has been said that the «Social Summit» was originally «an ownerless meeting», compared with the other important international meetings of the nineties which motivated the social movements and citizen groups with specific interests (children, environment, human rights, population, women, habitat) to involve themselves in the preparation, development and monitoring of the outcome of these.*

*It is certain that the idea of the Social Summit was more the product of a political analysis of the structural situation on a global level than of a sustained international campaign. It did not arise from any one particular sector of civil society, nor was it an idea which had been around for some time but had not been acted upon. It was simply an evident necessity.*

*The summit emerged almost silently within the intergovernmental process. Chile –returned to democracy under President Aylwin – proposed it at the ECOSOC Social Committee in 1991 and following the normal vicissitudes of the multilateral system it remained convoked for the United Nations General Assembly in 1992. An almost lightening speed given the institutional sloth of the world organisation.*

*The speed of the operation took many governments and civil society agents by surprise and this led to the image of a Summit «without bases». However, this only lasted a short time and very soon the more visionary leaders of civil society discerned the political potential and possibilities for popular mobilisation offered by the Social Summit, which culminated in the presence of nearly 20,000 representatives from the non governmental world in Copenhagen. There, they ratified the decision to make themselves into the force which would monitor the execution of the commitments of the Summit.*

*However, no individual group developed a sense of having sectoral property as had occurred in the other specialist conferences, but instead, they developed a sense of shared property where all the dimensions have their own space.*

*The convocation was seen as a new process, a difference which attracted the leading agents of civil society who were central in the other Conferences and Summits. With the women's movement at the head, the integrating potential of the Social Summit was being moulded and it was clear that Copenhagen would be an occasion to ratify what had already been achieved and to promote new commitments from the governments at the highest political level (personal security, the eradication of poverty, the humanisation of the structural adjustment programmes, the acceptance of the principle that Africa's public debt must be cancelled, amongst other issues.)*

*When they met in Copenhagen during the World Summit on Social Development, the world's heads of State and government declared they had met with bodies representing public opinion in their nations which had put the issues of poverty, unemployment and social disintegration on the international agenda. A meeting that dealt with the most burning social issues of the end of the millennium could not remain an "orphan" for long.*

*Those responsible for world politics recognised in Copenhagen that even the powers of their governments added together to tackle the objectives agreed by everyone, would not be enough to bring about the aim of eradicating poverty from the world. And they also confirmed that the market mechanisms themselves do not work spontaneously towards these ends either. It was necessary, they said, for the civil society to participate – this third sector, not organised around the state or the quest for profit.*

*The people who the Copenhagen Declaration promised to benefit, those who live in poverty, the unemployed, those marginalised for*

disability, illness, age, gender or ethnic discrimination make up the majority of humanity. There is no lack of owners for the process initiated at the Social Summit. What does happen, however, is that the poor, the unemployed and the excluded are precisely those who have most difficulty in making their voices heard. It is still necessary for these majorities to "take ownership" of the ten ambitious commitments enunciated in the Danish capital and to campaign for the text of the documents to be transformed into a political reality.

Hundreds of thousands of organisations of all sorts are working to create solidarity with millions of people with the weakest sectors every day, all over the world. This is occurring from the big international philanthropic organisations to the small neighbourhood self-help groups and support networks, which are often informal and «invisible» but not, for all that, less effective for those living in poverty. Some are recent creations, others have more than a hundred years of history behind them, like the unions, and in many cases the basis of the action is the love thy neighbour principle of millenarian traditions, indissolubly linked to the culture and roots of all.

What the Social Summit offered as a new element, in a world which has become globalised at a great speed, was the concept that poverty is neither politically nor ethically acceptable, when it is known the planet has the resources to eradicate it and that, without ceasing to be the responsibility of every society and every State, it is up to the international system as a whole to resolve these issues. Moreover, along with the maintenance of peace, they are the "raison d'être" of the international system itself. Without equity there is no stability. Without equal opportunities there are no legitimate results.

Between the optimistic promises of the expanding markets and technologies developing at a dizzying speed and the glaring reality of evident inequalities stands the daily decision making of every governor, every executive, consumer and citizen. It is not enough to accept that the supportive organisations can act and be stimulated; it is not enough to invite them to participate in the planning sessions of governments and international organisms. They need to be able to formally question those who make the decisions at every level. This is how the political will to implement the commitments is born or strengthened.

As we approach the 21st century, contemporary democracy requires a new notion of accountability. Those to be held "accountable" are not only the public authorities, but all those in the governmental or private ambit who can exert power and influence over a society. On another front, the classic vision of the monitoring function of the parliaments over the government must be added to in many instances by the monitoring function which can be exercised by entities within the organised civil society.

Moreover, when we observe the increasing transferral of power from the public to the private sector, it becomes clear that new super-monitoring mechanisms are needed to respond to this new situation.

It is in this context that the crucial importance of the citizen as an initial and primary trustee of popular sovereignty comes to light. In the next few years we will see increasingly stronger voluntary citizens organisations appear, taking on the tasks of monitoring progress on issues of common interest with the public or private power structures, and they will also receive the legitimacy to present questions and demands representative of the desires of the majority of citizens.

Thus, we are already seeing mayors and councillors discussing investment plans and their effects on the community with private enterprises; consumer bodies who concentrate on the problems of the quality, rice and the relevance of products on the market and doctors organisations which try to guide the research and development of the pharmaceutical companies in a more social direction.

The «Social Watch» report is one of the mechanisms for this formal questioning. With testimonies, reflection and criticism, it complements the groundwork of the organisations which express themselves through this. At times when the indices of growth, profitability or competitiveness are constantly brought to our attention, an «index of commitments fulfilled» by the governments and other relevant agents is a healthy contribution, above all when this has been designed to praise the effort rather than show the prosperity achieved often as a result of historical injustices which contemporary democracy must be capable of reversing.

In the year 2000 the governments will meet again to evaluate the action taken since Copenhagen and agree on new initiatives. The United Nations General Assembly recently decided this evaluation will be a special process through the Social Development Commission an a Preparatory Committee on a political level. This is how the governments reiterated their commitment to the issues of the Social Summit. We consequently know from the outset that this will be an occasion where once again, at a high political level, human beings and their needs will be placed at the heart of international debate. These formal instances offer new opportunities for the participation of the citizen organisations and voices like those which are expressed in this report can be heard and exert influence based on their experience, their practice and their knowledge of the real situation which «Social Watch» has made public knowledge.

The capacity of the civil society to exercise citizen control is founded on certain acquired experiences: there is no substitute for organisation, mobilisation, citizen consciousness and, definitively, individual commitment.

And thus we come back to the point of departure and the point of arrival – everything depends on our personal will, our intimate conviction, our commitment to the common good, our creative boldness, our lack of fear before what appears impossible and above all our decision to wield with pride the values and ideals which inspire us without shrinking before the cynics of conformity or the ruling powers.

All that I have said above means that I look with hope and anticipation on the task which «Social Watch» has ahead of it.



Juan Somavía •  
Citizen