

## PREFACE

### «EVERYONE MUST PLAY THEIR PART»

By the dawn of the new millennium, how many nations will have achieved the social development and gender equality objectives defined by the international community? Ten have already attained all the measurable goals for which statistics are available, forty will have done so before the year 2000 is out, and another forty should follow suit if they maintain the rate of progress recorded since 1990.

However, ten nations post a substantially worse performance than at the beginning of the decade and in another thirty, progress is either negligible or too slow. In too many countries, basic information on whether progress is being made in this area is not available. The ten top-performance countries are, in alphabetical order, Cyprus, Denmark, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, South Korea, Sweden and Tonga. With the exception of Tonga, whose current ranking is due to recent progress, according to most indicators surveyed (including the objective of allocating 0.7% of national wealth to the development of other countries, where applicable), by 1990 the other countries had already reached their goals.

Afghanistan, Congo, Iraq, Papua–New Guinea, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Zaire posted the worst performances.

**While the goals targeted are feasible, many countries have failed to make a sufficient effort. The assistance promised has yet to materialize, the participation of citizens is paltry, and globalization is not benefiting those who need it most.**

This is the principal conclusion of the 1998 «Social Watch» report, based on inputs from coalitions and independent citizen organizations in some fifty nations. The report also includes a comparative progress analysis that measures the few official statistics that are available.

At the World Summit on Social Development, held in March 1995 in Denmark, and the Fourth World Women's Conference, which met in September that same year in China, the governments of the world agreed to an ambitious program to fight poverty and gender discrimination, and to promote employment and the integration of excluded and underprivileged members of society. These are solemn political commitments, but unlike the engagements taken on by governments with the World Trade Organization that replaced GATT at the end of the «Uruguay Round» of negotiations, or the conditions imposed on indebted countries by the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, they are not compulsory, i.e. not legally binding.

The basic political will to implement these commitments in each country hinges on citizens monitoring progress on the promises made. This is why a group of non–profit organizations that attended the debates of the Social Summit and the Women's Conference decided to launch «Social Watch,» an annual report on compliance with agreements, prepared by individuals actively involved in these issues.

The most ambitious commitment arising from these conferences is to eradicate poverty worldwide. Our planet boasts sufficient resources to provide all of its inhabitants with what is needed for a decent life. Poverty is neither a curse nor a tragic, unavoidable circumstance. It is a direct result of the way in which societies organize the distribution of their goods and opportunities among their members and among nations. **The complete elimination of poverty is an ethical and a political imperative, comparable to the abolition of slavery over a century ago. However, the international community has not established a deadline, date or concrete timeframe for completing this task.** Instead, governments must set their own goals. Although many countries have taken on this commitment, incorporating it into specific plans or economic programs, very few have announced specific goals and deadlines. Furthermore, the current or planned sweeping transformations in the world economy, i.e. implementation of the «Uruguay Round» agreements by the World Trade Organization or the proposal for a Multilateral Investment Agreement, will necessarily speed up the globalization process, giving transnational firms more rights and leaving governments with less. These agreements are being processed without even examining their impact on the poorest countries and sectors. Despite evidence to the contrary (see the comparative analysis appended), the advocates of globalization continue to insist that the benefits of globalization will magically «trickle» down to the destitute.

To quote Herbet «Betinho» de Souza (guru of the massive Brazilian campaign against hunger, who died a few months ago and to whose memory we dedicate this report): «Everyone must play their part». «Like the hummingbird that carries water in its beak to extinguish forest fires,» hundreds of thousands of Brazilians rallied to the cause of solidarity and assistance. All over the world, the efforts made by volunteer

organizations, grassroots groups and non-governmental organizations that provide humanitarian assistance, education or health are legion. More often than not they are informal and invisible, just like the domestic tasks performed by women. When they are accounted for, as is the case with foreign development assistance, the figures recorded for international funds from foundations and non-governmental organizations equal or exceed those of governments and intergovernmental institutions.

The heads of State and government who met in Copenhagen during the Social Summit recognized that they cannot single-handedly achieve the goals fixed for social development. Citizen organizations whose participation is solicited do not simply provide humanitarian assistance and basic social services. They also want to voice their opinion on government social policy, evaluate government effectiveness, and be given the opportunity to remind governments that they have freely made a moral and political commitment.

«Social Watch» is involved in the latter at the international level by gathering reports from national and local organizations. The 1996 report published a year after the Copenhagen Conference included thirteen national reports. The 1997 issue contained 26 national reports; this year's boasts 35. We would like to highlight the inclusion of reports from Central America, where the local «Social Watch» coalitions have a twofold mission: following up on the Summit agreements and monitoring national peace agreements that have put an end to decades of civil war.

Social contexts are complex, the situation, history and social fibre of each country differs and, ultimately, only the society in question can judge its own accomplishments and goals. This is why «Social Watch» only includes reports prepared by organizations that are active in social development work in that very country.

**These organizations, very often coalitions, are the lifeblood of «Social Watch». Their efforts are not limited to contributing to this international report, but include disseminating within their own countries the conclusions analyzed at seminars with other organizations, submitted to governments and in many cases, discussed with them at round-table or other meetings, frequently with the participation of local representatives of intergovernmental institutions.**

For many of the organizations carrying out concrete work in the field, contributing to this report also means an opportunity to broaden their understanding of national problems, assess their own action and establish a dialogue between gender, human rights or community development players.

The emphasis on processing a report built «from the bottom upwards» is «Social Watch»'s distinguishing feature, and ironically, its Achilles heel. Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia are regions where the need to promote citizen involvement is most pressing. These regions are under-represented and will require additional coverage in upcoming issues.

The basic idea of «Social Watch» is simple: it queries governments on what they have done regarding their commitments and compares the results with the pre-defined goals. Methodology and progress measurement mechanisms have been developed and improved at various regional and international meetings. Thirteen commitments towards goals that can be monitored and statistically assessed were taken from the analysis of the ten Copenhagen commitments, the Beijing action program and the goals set by other international conferences. This year's report features a qualitative evaluation of «political will.»

The national reports, which are too lengthy to be reproduced in their entirety, and the complete statistical series on which the methodological analysis and discussion are based, are available on the Internet at <http://www.chasque.apc.org/socwatch/>.

Common guidelines have been prepared in order to facilitate analysis and comparison of national reports. The laborious task of drafting indexes for measurement purposes, enabling progress to be rewarded or shortfalls to be condemned, has already begun.

We all know that figures are unable to reflect shades of meaning, but we all like to know «who won», in particular the press, which is used to reporting on Nobel Prizes, Oscars or Olympic medals and whose role is crucial in forming public opinion.

The statistics and census offices in each country gather data that measure various factors. Every year, the World Bank's Report on World Development records nations' wealth, measured in terms of per capita GDP. The United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index complements this information with data on education, health and income distribution. UNICEF, the agency responsible for following-up on the commitments enshrined during the Children's Summit Meeting, develops progress indicators. The idea is to not only record how countries fare in terms of results, but also which nations work hardest to attain goals.

**«Social Watch» intends to develop an «Index of Fulfilled Commitments» to evaluate the decision-makers—the ones who made the solemn commitments—empowered to act on them.**

This index is not yet ready (the information necessary is available only for a handful of countries), but this report comes close to providing the same information in the table comparing progress toward quantifiable goals, and in the findings and initial conclusions of a survey on government plans and programs and citizen participation in these mechanisms.

In addition to its annual examination of the basic commitments, «Social Watch» analyzes one major topic in depth in each of its issues. It urges national coalitions to pay special attention to this area in their reports and calls for papers on that particular subject of global or regional interest. In 1997 the topic was poverty. In this year's report, the emphasis is on equality. The 1999 report will focus on the subject of citizenship.

Citizenship comprises participation, debate and criticism. All opinions, comments and suggestions are welcome. Those interested in airing their views are urged to contact the secretariat in Montevideo, the members of the coordinating committee, or any participating organization. **«Social Watch», ever open, is a permanent «work-in-progress».**