

# PROLOGUE

*This Social Watch report is the product of citizen coalitions from over forty countries. Each country summary is the result of many weeks of research, consultations and debate. The authors come from different backgrounds. Some are engaged in defending human rights, others organise the poor at community level. Some work for trade unions representing thousands of workers, others concentrate on gender issues.*

*All Social Watch contributors are required to investigate the facts and the latest trends in countries where vital statistics are often missing, hidden or distorted to reflect official views. Then they must summarise in a few pages the conclusions of lengthy discussions, asking themselves such questions as: What is our main message? Does this or that detail provide convincing or merely anecdotal evidence?*

*The wealth of information and rich discussion behind every country report could fill whole books, and in fact, many of the national Social Watch coalitions are starting to publish such books, so that this important resource is not lost. But our work does not end with the publication of reports. The results must be made widely known so that they can influence and effectively shape the policies that will right injustice.*

*The world leaders committed themselves in 1995<sup>1</sup> to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world. Every year since then, Social Watch has asked governments what they have done to implement this commitment ... and every year, we have reported on what has and has not been achieved.*

*To report internationally on what happens nationally improves transparency and accountability. Providing numerical indicators is a rough attempt to capture complex realities in a simplified way. Yet, as the Olympic Games and beauty contests show, international comparisons are a powerful motivator.*

*Social Watch follows indicators for each of the key international commitments in detail, so that we can identify the areas where more effort is needed and which policies need to be reoriented. These commitments are summarised in three tables. One shows the present situation in key areas of social development. The second shows progress and gives due credit to those*

*countries (and there are many) where there is consistent improvement despite adverse conditions in areas such as health, education or gender equity. A third, introduced as a separate table for the first time in this report, highlights those areas where political decisions make a difference and express the will to be serious about implementing the commitments.*

*The commitments have been reaffirmed and they have evolved. In 2000, the biggest gathering ever of heads of state and government unanimously promised: "We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty".<sup>2</sup> And poverty was as much at the heart of the discussions of corporate and government leaders meeting at the World Economic Forum in New York in February 2002 as it was at the alternative World Social Forum of civil society organisations in Porto Alegre.*

*No other cause or campaign has ever enjoyed such strong moral support ... and so few actual results.*

*The task of abolishing poverty is not easy. As the figures and maps in this report show, more than half of humanity lives in poverty. A disproportionate majority of the poor are women and children. The struggle ahead seems overwhelming.*

*Yet, the resources needed to abolish poverty are abundant. To adequately feed and educate every child and provide health services to every mother would require only a minor percentage of the personal fortunes of a handful of the richest men (there are few women on that list) on this planet. And, yes, a lot of that wealth resides in the very same places where many of the poorest of the poor live.*

*We have been told again and again that "globalisation" is the key to the solving this problem. If only all restrictions on international trade and the flow of capital were lifted, greater riches could be created and their circulation would be like water in connecting vases, lifting all to the level of those who were lucky (or clever) enough to have started earlier.*

*This is not what is actually happening. Wealth and power is more concentrated now than ever before Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize for Economy 2001, concluded:*

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<sup>1</sup> This commitment was made at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen, Denmark, which was attended by 115 heads of state and government, an attendance record surpassed only by the Millennium Summit of the United Nations General Assembly in 2000.

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<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 11 of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

*"[W]e do not see Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', because it doesn't exist."<sup>3</sup> For the market to operate as an efficient distribution mechanism all participants should concur to it with the same information, something that never happens in practice.*

*The heads of state at the 1995 Social Summit drew the same conclusion: "We know that poverty, lack of productive employment and social disintegration are an offence to human dignity. We also know that they are negatively reinforcing and represent a waste of human resources and a manifestation of ineffectiveness in the functioning of markets and economic and social institutions and processes."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, "Public policies are necessary to correct market failures, to complement market mechanisms, to maintain social stability and to create a national and international economic environment that promotes sustainable growth on a global scale."<sup>5</sup>*

*Each of the country reports in this volume addresses public policies required at the national level to combat poverty. Internationally, the list is well known: a solution to the debt problem, international market access for developing country products, controls over the disruptive flows of speculative capital, and last but not least, more, higher quality development aid that effectively reaches the poor.*

*We must put an end to the double standards and hypocrisy of an international system that moves capital freely around the world but does not grant workers the same right, that requires poor countries to open their markets but does not require the same of rich countries, that forces developing countries to tighten their belts in times of recession but allows rich governments to intervene in times of crisis.*

*Double standards beget cynicism, apathy, corruption and deterioration of democratic life and the very social fabric that holds communities together. Double standards also motivate people to raise their voices, organise, demand transparency and advocate for change. Therein lies our hope. After all, the presidents, prime ministers and kings who were gathered in Copenhagen, they who have the power to introduce reforms, wrote: "We can continue to hold the trust of the people of the world only if we make their needs our priority."<sup>6</sup>*

*Roberto Bissio  
Montevideo, March 2002*

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3 From notes taken by the author at Joseph Stiglitz's conference at the Central Bank in Montevideo, November 2001.

4 Paragraph 23 of the Copenhagen Declaration.

5 Paragraph 6 of the Copenhagen Programme of Action.

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6 Paragraph 23 of the Copenhagen Declaration.