



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
13 November 2020

English only

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-ninth session

8–17 February 2021

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable
development: the role of digital technologies on social
development and well-being of all**

Statement submitted by Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

A just transition to sustainable development requires that sustainable development strategies fully respect and strive to fulfill unalienable and universal human rights principles.

Unless efforts to create sustainable development strategies from the international community and nations are rooted in these unalienable and universally agreed human rights, they will ultimately fail to deliver sustainable development that is truly socially just. In fact, unless universally recognized human rights underpin efforts to achieve sustainable development, they will result in social injustice.

Because of the mission of C-Fam we wish to highlight the important principle of protection of the family, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and translated into binding obligations in international human rights treaties, and how it relates to social justice in the context of policies and programs to achieve sustainable development. International law defines the family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society, entitled to protection by society and the state.

Even as the family acquires specific legal characteristics across legal systems and social contexts, cultures and religions, international law recognizes and protects the fundamental human right to marry and found a family and entitles the family to special protection and assistance. The fundamental right to freely marry and found a family antedates any formal recognition of marriage by society and the state, and sanctions the self-evident truth of marriage as a permanent and exclusive union of a man and a woman naturally oriented to the mutual benefit of spouses, procreation and childrearing, as well as the common good of society more broadly.

The right to marry and found a family is buttressed by binding human rights instruments with concomitant rights and duties within the family, and of the state towards the family. Among the obligations recognized in binding international law is the obligation of states to protect the right to work to an adequate standard of living, both predicated in binding international instruments of both the individual and his or her family.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused millions of workers all around the world to lose their job. The right to work is now strained in unprecedented ways. And the efforts of nations to rebuild after COVID-19 must be carried out in full respect of the right of everyone to work and their right to provide a dignified life for their family.

Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights unambiguously states that “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.” The same article assures that “Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself *and his family* an existence worthy of human dignity.” It also further entitles the individual and his or her family to social protection measures that supplement the remuneration for work when such remuneration is not adequate.

Similarly, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Article 6, guarantees the right of everyone to work as “the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts” and further requires State Parties to protect the right of everyone to “just and favorable conditions of work”, including a “decent living for themselves and their families” (Article 7).

Article 10 of the same covenant enjoins on State Parties that “The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its establishment and

while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children.” And Article 11, immediately following, predicates the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living of the individual *and* his or her family. This includes adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

The right to work and an adequate standard of living are central to protection of the family. International and domestic policies to achieve sustainable development must make the right to work and an adequate standard of living a central component and target of their policies. Without this sustainable development policies run the risk of generating socially unjust outcomes that do not allow individuals and their families to realize their right to work and to an adequate standard of living. The COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic aftermath should reinforce this more than ever.

One way in which a socially unjust outcome is already being experienced by millions of individuals and their families around the world, is by how domestic and international subsidies and assistance favor large corporations over smaller ones. Governments and international agencies must ensure their policies do not unjustly discriminate against small family businesses in favor of large corporations. This kind of discrimination could constitute a violation of the right of individuals and their family to work and to an adequate standard of living.

Another way in which policies designed to achieve sustainable development can result in socially unjust outcomes for individuals and their family is when governments and international agencies discriminate against businesses, especially small family-owned businesses, that fully complied with existing sustainability standards and other requirements before the COVID-19 pandemic struck in their efforts to rebuild economies after the pandemic. This may happen if sustainability standards and other requirements to receive international and domestic assistance are different from those in place before the pandemic struck.

If such new standards and requirements, established to receive business subsidies or loans for example, are not accompanied by measures to level the playing field, so that all business, especially small family-owned businesses, have the opportunity to comply with the new standards and requirements in order to continue to operate, then the result would be socially unjust. Such policies would injure smaller family-owned businesses who may be placed at an impossible disadvantage by the new standards with respect to where they were before the pandemic. Small businesses must remain eligible for all international and domestic assistance so long as they comply with reasonable standard and requirements that were set in place prior to the pandemic leading the global economy into a recession. These businesses must have the opportunity to catch up to any new standards and requirements that are set in place after the pandemic struck.

Therefore, governments and international agencies should focus rebuilding efforts on helping business back to their feet, so they can be in the same or a similar situation as before the pandemic, and only after, they should add an emphasis on new and additional sustainability standards and requirements. Also, here, such new standards and requirements must only

One area where sustainability requirements are especially grievous, and governments and international agencies must be especially careful is food security.

As the World Food Program’s leadership has warned from the outset of the global pandemic, draconian lockdowns would lead to hunger. And we are witnessing the price of panic now, as an unprecedented number of people throughout the world are reliant on international assistance for their basic food needs.

In such a precarious and dangerous situation, it would be counter-productive to institute new standards and regulations applicable to food production if they would

negatively impact the ability of individuals to afford food for themselves and their families. Justice demands that governments refrain from adopting additional regulatory requirements that would unreasonably increase the price of food in the midst of a global pandemic that has shut down the world's economy.

While it is true that the destruction and desolation caused by the pandemic require nations and the international community to make an effort to build back better. Building back better cannot come at the expense of the right of individuals and their family to work and to an adequate standard of living, especially when it comes to food security.

In addition to measures relating to the right to food, governments should not forget the importance of creating an environment conducive to family formation and stability. The right to freely marry and found a family is a fundamental right. Governments should be mindful of laws and policies that impose onerous burdens that make it harder for men and women to marry and found a family during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is essential to a socially just recovery from the pandemic. There can be no real effort to build better without adequately taking into account the family.
