



Special Meeting of the Economic and Social Council

*The future of work: towards a productive, inclusive and sustainable
global society*

ECLAC Headquarters – Santiago, Chile

Round Table 3: Balancing the Opportunities and Challenges of a Changing Labour Market to Ensure Decent Work for All

Wednesday, 24 January 2024, 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

**Keynote speaker
Ambassador Juan Somavia**

Thank you, Dear Ambassador Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Vice President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Croatia to the United Nations for your clear introduction and orientation. We have worked together in the past and I am happy to do so again today under your chairmanship.

Dear friends, Ambassadors, delegates, participants,

To begin, let me say that I feel so much at home in ECOSOC. It is very much a part of my life. Before I was an ambassador to the UN, twice its President during my period as Permanent Representative of Chile in the 90' and afterwards as DG of ILO and in many activities, one of the last ones, some years ago, as co-Chair of the ECOSOC Independent Team of Advisors. I am highly stimulated to be here and thank you so much for this invitation.

Let me say how happy I am to see Ambassador Paula Narvaez as President of ECOSOC. She is a major Chilean personality, don't forget that she was a presidential candidate. She is now putting her enormous personal and professional capacity for leadership at the service of the United Nations at a moment that it is so essential in the world, for the UN to deliver. In many ways the UN is being looked at.

I am going to be addressing our issues in a personal capacity, with a nongovernmental, civil society hat as President of the Foreign Policy Forum of Chile and as honorary member of the Club de Madrid, whose president Danilo Turk is also a former ambassador to the UN and Undersecretary general. He and the Club de Madrid have been actively highlighting the need to deal with urgent social issues. In this respect, the Club's 2023 Policy Dialogue, held in Brasilia, addressed the issue of "rethinking social development for people and planet" and the importance of the proposed Social Summit 2025. President Turk will be participating with our Secretary General, Maria Elena Aguero in the upcoming meeting of the Social Commission of ECOSOC in February.

In preparing for this presentation, on shaping a future with decent work and universal social protection, a saying came to my mind, which I particularly like. The idea that "the best way to predict the future is to invent it". I couldn't imagine a better description of what the UN is about, understand the multiple problems the future brings with it and invent ways to deal with them. It is a perfect reflection of the challenges that we have in front of us in all walks of life and in every society.

That means, in practical terms that, in formulating policy, the **what** and the **how** must go together. We are very good at being ambitious about the **what** to do, and less so about the **how to do it**.

In addressing the future of decent work and social protection I will concentrate on the HOW and, in particular, what I feel is a key political and international cooperation initiative to deal with it: the potential **World Social Summit in 2025**.

A well-conceived and well-prepared summit by member States, with ample participation of all relevant parties, could generate a global dynamic to get people's issues, needs, demands, aspirations moving out of the relative stagnation they are today.

Just some figures: 60% of employed workers are informal, 4 billion people don't have any social protection at all, pre-pandemic gender income gap would take 70 years to close, this is a constant in gender statistics, the decades, in front of us just to reach equality. All the data that was discussed yesterday, the rich presentation by ILO DG Houngho and others, and the fact that, we don't have good results from the 2030 Agenda up to now, impels us to act urgently. We need a strong political push and the political push that I see available is, a combination of processes that can make the 2030 Agenda move ahead much quicker and begin looking beyond 2030.

If you combine the strength and clarity of the SDG Summit orientation, the pertinent aspects of the Summit of the Future and the content of a powerful Social Summit, that builds on the 1995 Copenhagen Summit, we may give ourselves the opportunity to invent a way forward that responds to people's needs and everything we have been discussing these days.

I am proud to say that the Copenhagen Summit was a Chilean initiative. At the time, it was both, the biggest meeting of Heads of State and Government in the history of the United Nations and the first occasion in which "people's" issues, as we called them then, received such extraordinary global political support. I was involved in the process, as Ambassador of Chile's recently recovered democratic tradition. I Chaired its Preparatory Committee in which our main worry was to have the necessary time to do a good job.

From the moment it was launched, by the General Assembly in November 1992 to March 1995, we had more than two years to do it. The fact that we had the time, was an essential part of its coming together. It permitted us to progressively generate a sense of common purpose and the political will to have a successful outcome. This was built on a process of deepening understanding of the very varied specificity of national frameworks and needs and a very open approach by a government-led process at receiving proposals and suggestions from civil society and nongovernmental spaces.

Today we have a very different international context than the one we had at the time. When we proposed the Social Summit in the Social Committee of ECOSOC in May 1991, the Cold War was coming to an end and there was hope in the air. The belief that the multilateral world and the United Nations could play a greater role in peacekeeping and addressing development issues.

In our days, the varied levels of discontent and lack of trust with governance and institutions, in so many places, has in part also reached the United Nations. The questions "what is the UN doing about it" is something that

appears more than I would like to see. Clearly, I believe, on social issues, much, much more is done than what is seen, but the question is there.

For the United Nations, that is, to put it clearly: it's 193 State members deciding together, with the support of an engaged Secretariat, and the leadership of the Secretary General who proposed it, a successful Social Summit 2025, is a major political opportunity to show that it has heard and acted on the social discontent we are seeing. Also, that it is responding to the hope that continues to be out there in terms of what the UN can do for people. The Copenhagen Declaration is a good point of departure, which, in fact, it is referred to in the first line of our guiding document for this roundtable.

A key element of the summit's success will be something that I think is essential again, and more so today: the degree to which the results reflect the highly varied regional, national, and local specificity of social development issues from a national perspective. When we get to the moment in which, we begin putting down in writing our agreements, we all need to have a good collective knowledge of the feelings and perceptions discussed back home, in countries and regions, and the ways in which Social Summit issues are being looked at from a real-life point of view.

My question in relation to this is:

WHY? why is it that it continues to be so difficult to place people, individuals, families, workers, citizens, women, the poor and vulnerable human beings...at the heart of the benefits of development and growth.

It is, first and foremost, an answer we must seek, within our own societies. What can we do to maximize our national capacities for political convergence in responding to our citizen's needs.

However, in this interconnected world, we have to think together better, on how to address the diversity of structural and emerging obstacles faced by the policies we are proposing and how to deal with them.

I think that the analysis of the **what**, the **how**, and the **obstacles** have to go together from the outset.

In fostering policy, as I said before, we are very good at being ambitious on the "what" to do, less on the "how" to do it.

To move forward, for the UN there is certainly a responsibility to act and bite the bullet, but also a significant political opportunity to be relevant, with a successful Social Summit.

To move forward we do not have easy answers and certainly no models to follow. So, we need to go back to basics, in one particular sense, what's the significance of decent work, and social protection? The social significance. Why are we using this concept of decent work and why are we using the idea of social protection floors.

The very notion of Decent Work is a whole-of-society approach. It is based on the founding principle of the ILO that "labour is not a commodity" and that the quality of work defines in many ways the quality of a society. It moves the axis of analysis from the "economic cost" of labour to the "social value" of work.

And this apparent analytical question, lands smack in the middle of real life. High levels of Decent Work, with its many impacts on your quality of life, and your community; achieved through the implementation of ILO conventions and recommendations, is a source of much good:

- Of personal dignity, we prove ourselves at work.
- Of greater family stability and security, in the way people want to live together.
- Of more peaceful communities, where there is well-being there is less tension and violence,
- Of better organization and citizen participation, you feel much more a part of society, and it is a source of
- Of policy and political opinion, because you look at your own reality and draw conclusions.

If decent work can be all of this, it means, from a whole-of-society perspective, that it's true significance lies in its contribution to a peaceful and integrated society rather being considered just a cost of production.

I won't go into details, but the same is true with universal social protection. It must be seen as a life cycle investment in human security rather than a burdensome social expenditure. This is the foundation for ILO's recommendation on social protection floors, which means that it's not the

same floor globally. In each country we have decide on a social protection floor, nationally determined.

Dear friends, I have come to the end of this presentation, and I have some ideas on how to get the preparations of the potential Social Summit going but I don't know too well, what's the best way of positing it. I feel uncomfortable about saying what you have to do But, I also feel the responsibility to transmit some suggestions for you to consider, based on my experience.

So here I go, I had a dream last night that I want to share with you. It is inspired in the idea that the best way to predict the future is to invent it. So, there is little bit of invention involved. Of course, this is not the Martin Luther King dream, which has guided me in so many moments in life.

It's a small organizational dream.

Soon in the near future, you come together in New York, resolve the differences you have and find a way to convene a second World Social Summit to deal with the realities of today, with the Copenhagen Summit as a key background.

The PGA then quickly appoints two co-facilitators and a bureau is established. Now in my dream, what is the key? If that happens soon member States give themselves the instruments to manage the preparatory process with sufficient time ahead and can start preparations right away.

I have often been told that 2024 is dedicated to the Summit of the Future and other priorities, and we should not distract this with too much activity around the potential Social Summit. And I certainly agree.

That's why the suggestions ahead are based on having in 2024, a whole-of-UN approach in the field, outside of headquarters, with full engagement and involvement of co-facilitators and the Bureau, and reporting to ECOSOC and the General Assembly, as necessary.

The results would be available at the end of the year to inform the negotiating process.

The whole-of-UN approach would involve 3 parallel and converging activities requested by the preparatory process to the UN System:

a) Support countries, where requested, in the definition of their needs and policy priorities, through an appropriate engagement of the Resident Coordinators system and the whole country teams. In this country-led activity there can be many results, not least to generate a knowledge base for all to understand national specificities of others. Where there are no Resident Coordinators, appropriate methods will be used.

b) Linked to these national activities, the Regional Commissions could advance in the identification of the principal regional strategic interests and possible in-region collective policy proposals. As well as discussions among regions exchanging information and advancing on shared understandings and joint proposals, through Regional Collaborative Platforms.

c) Another key issue the Social Summit would have to address, is the policy and operational articulation of the different social mandates of the UN system. In fact, the UN as a whole has a very strong social mandate. It emerges from the Charter, the Universal Declaration, the principal Specialized Agencies, UNDP, other bodies and the pertinent Conventions, Declarations and Resolutions, among others. For policy making purposes, we need to articulate them in a much more integrated and interactive way, respecting the individuality of each mandate. They are all interdependent in different ways. Creating a small group of Heads of Specialized Agencies and UN Organizations to address these questions, could lead to developing the notion of a “UN social mandate” and important new manners of working together that go beyond the Social Summit.

These three whole-of-UN- activities do not significantly hamper the fundamental process in New York dedicated to the Summit of the Future, and other important issues. However, it would allow to gain a good amount of time in preparing the Social Summit.

This is the essence of the dream, I hope it comes true, if it doesn't, well, then, it was just a dream, but I wanted to share it with you.

Thank you so very much for this invitation to be here again in ECOSOC, to be here with all that you represent, a place I feel like home.

Thank you so much.