



Video Statement by H.E. Bob Rae (Canada)

President of the Economic and Social Council

48th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the
Council of Europe

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Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you for the 48th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

As President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and as a former leader of a provincial government in my home country of Canada, I know firsthand the impact which local action can have in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in propelling social development and social justice.

This conversation you are having is especially timely.

The First World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 established a vision for human-centered development and catalyzed global commitments for eradicating poverty, expanding social protection, and advancing decent work and social inclusion. The legacy of Copenhagen is embedded in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Yet, I think we have to recognize that Copenhagen remains unfinished business. There is still much work to be done.

Despite progress over three decades, global crises and structural barriers threaten hard-won gains. COVID-19, climate change, rising cost-of-living, energy prices, debt distress, and perhaps most



important, increased global conflict have reinforced social vulnerabilities all around the world.

Rising inequality is deepening economic and social divides, and we now have a digital divide to add to that. Informally, in labor markets, we continue to see that people are facing tremendous challenges to their rights and their livelihoods and we know that there are inadequate social protection systems are leaving millions very, very vulnerable.

In this context, the decision of the UN General Assembly to convene the Second World Summit for Social Development — 30 years after Copenhagen — is timely and necessary. This meeting, which will happen in Doha in November, provides an opportunity to renew commitments and highlight the need for robust institutions, respect for human rights, and inclusive governance to achieve social progress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Social development cannot be the responsibility of national administrations alone. We all know that local communities are where policies are transformed into practical action and progress that is really tangible.

As the sphere of government closest to the people, local and regional governments are essential. They design, implement, and monitor programmes that are tailored to local needs. They understand the challenges that are happening at the grassroots. They foster participatory governance.

Local knowledge can identify those actions that will reap the most benefits across all the sectors and SDGs. The initiative of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to engage in discussions on the



Second World Summit for Social Development is going to help us reinforce the critical role of local and regional governments in achieving social justice. We have to build on the momentum of your conference.

As we move forward, let us renew our collective commitment to people-centered development, social justice, and governance that is genuinely inclusive. Let us ensure that the outcomes of the Summit reflect all voices.

Thank you.