



## Notes from the Field...

### **Social Development Panel Addresses Disasters and Inequality**

“Any disaster risk reduction program and humanitarian action must be inclusive of all, including us- one billion people with disability in the world” Mosharraf Hossain, Director of Global Policy Influencing and Research, ADD International.

“The empowerment of people affected by natural and human made disasters to reduce inequality: Addressing the differential impacts on persons with disabilities, older persons and youth” was the topic of the High-Level Panel discussion during the Commission for Social Development, 57<sup>th</sup> Session. Panelist Mr. Hossain addressed global warming and natural disaster and its impact on inequality; those who are worst affected by the climate-related hazards and subsequent disasters are people with disabilities, older people, women, and youth. According to the Flagship Report on Disability and Development, the impact of disasters is very high on people with disabilities as they have a less coping capacity. It becomes more complicated when there is intersectionality of disability, age, and sex.

Lisa Marsh Ryerson, President, AARP Foundation, elaborated on the same issue by providing the example of Hurricane Katrina that hit the US in 2005; almost three-quarters of disaster-related deaths were among people age 60 and over, despite the fact that they comprised only 15% of the population in the areas that were impacted. In a disaster situation like Katrina, speed, mobility, quick reactions and easy access to transportation are crucial for survival, and older persons and those with mental or physical disability often have no access to transportation or ways for evacuation and thus are left behind. Mr. Hossain suggested that from his experience of implementing Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction project in Bangladesh that mobilizing communities is effective by engaging all members of the society to find solutions using indigenous knowledge. It is also crucial that marginalized groups are included in decision making-- “nothing about us, without us” -- because they better understand their needs. Developing policies at local and state levels that address the need for long term plans for disaster risk reduction is essential to change in the ways we deal with marginalized groups during disasters.



## Statements and Powerpoints

### High Level Panel Discussion



### **The Accountability Dimension: IASSW and ICSW Co-sponsored Side Event**

“Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality”. **Article**

### **22, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**

In December, the UN celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a milestone acknowledged at the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission for Social Development. The IASSW and ICSW held a side event to discuss the accountability dimension by looking at the link between social protection and human rights. Thanks are due to ICSW for doing most of the work to organize the session. Dr. Lynne Healy, IASSW Main Representative to the UN, discussed the accountability potential of human rights mechanisms for the universal implementation of social and economic rights that relate to social protection. When exploring the link between human rights and social protection, we find that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) identified several social and economic rights that are particularly relevant to social protection. Although the 2030 agenda has been promoting social protection strongly, some critics notably Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, find the wording of the social protection related goals (SDGs) inadequate in failing to emphasize rights and avoiding human rights language. What is concerning in terms of the SDGs accountability and measurement system is that it fails to use data reported on commitments made under international human rights law. State members report on the progress made towards the 2030 agenda voluntarily without any obligation or mandated commitment. Dr. Healy added that there is accountability of effort and accountability of result, the effort can be measured in terms of legislations and programs, but results are more difficult to measure. It is important that we learn from the



human rights reporting to inform and improve accountability. Sergei Zelenev, Executive Director ICSW, added to the discussion the concept of social guarantees, which are “sets of basic social security guarantees that should ensure, as a minimum that, over the life cycle, all those who need it have access to essential health care and to basic income security.” Social guarantees can be provided to citizens by states using constitutional or other legal provisions as a baseline and a starting point. The conversation always becomes richer when we have someone who has been working on a ground level with the people. Helen Mudora, Programme manager, Africa Platform for Social Protection (APSP) shared her experience when tackling the issue of social protection. Helen’s organization trains community mentors in Kenya to ensure that the payments that are being transferred from the government are properly distributed. The accountability elements are: where people get their money, dignity in the delivery of the benefit, and ensuring the ability of the beneficiaries to complain about the process. Helen added that the goal is to build capacity of communities and to work toward “participatory social accountability.” To conclude the discussion Kate Donald, Program Director, Center for Economic and Social Rights, said social protection is crucial for reducing economic inequality and for tackling gender inequality. It is also a human right, however the rights focus very much depends on how social protection is designed and implemented. From a human rights perspective, universal programs are best. They equalize upwards, reduce social stigma, and get rid of exclusion errors. The discussion was very rich in content and very informative. However, when attending side events at the UN, we always find the time to be very short to capture all the

important conversations that we want to have with the speakers.



### Philip Alston

“Human Rights are out of Fashion” Says Philip Alston

Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, delivered a stark assessment of global inequalities and the forces exacerbating the problem in his keynote address to the NGO Forum on Social Development on February 15. He cited the dominance of neoliberal policies that have led to tax cuts, reductions in social services, deregulation, and privatization. He noted that all these trends are problematic if we wish to promote the rights of women and of people living in or





near poverty. Making matters worse is the growing resistance to promotion of human rights by many governments and international organizations, especially the financial organizations.

As Special Rapporteur, Alston made two fact-finding visits during the past year, one to Ghana and one to the UK. He cited Ghana as an example of a developing nation that is experiencing economic success, but could do much more to invest in social protection and the rights of women. Early marriage is common and there is low representation of women in government. In the UK, he found emphasis on austerity, with large cuts to local authorities and the closure of many safety net programs. Care burdens on women have increased. Austerity is presented as a financial approach but Alston sees it increasingly as an ideology to justify continuing cutbacks of government budgets.

The problems with privatization are that human rights are not protected and accountability is not ensured. Although a common argument is that the private sector can do things more efficiently, recent studies have shown the opposite, finding that private sector-run schools and hospitals are more costly and less efficient, and often provide lower quality service to the consumer. Alston urged the audience of members of civil society to push back and to defend human rights. He said we must have a value framework; “unless there is a genuine commitment to rights, there is no grounding to enable us to push back against neoliberalism.” Human rights are absent in the environments where fiscal policies are being made. Someone needs to be there to speak for gender sensitive and pro-poor policies. In keeping with the social protection theme of the 2019 session of the Commission for Social Development, he spoke against

narrow targeting of protection policies, urging instead broad-based, universal social protection.

Alston comes from an extensive background in human rights at the UN. He served as the first rapporteur on economic, social and cultural rights. You can watch his speech and the entire morning session of the NGO Forum on [webtv.un.org](http://webtv.un.org)

[Watch here](#)



### **Social Protection in Conflict: “Social Protection to reduce inequality and enhance social inclusion in countries affected by conflict”**

“There is no “one-size-fits-all” in terms of Social Protection response to crises” says Timo Voipio, Chief Expert on Social Protection at the government of Finland’s National Institute for Health and Welfare. Having social protection in place during a conflict increases the probability that people affected by the crisis will have access regardless of the crisis type. Social protection systems in countries that are not in conflict but are poor end up spending a lot of money on camps to help refugees. Lebanon is an example, where 90% of the Syrian refugees are not living in refugee camps but located in towns and villages. Using national existing social assistance programs will help reduce



response time, avoid duplication, strengthen national systems, offer choice and dignity, and support local economics. A comprehensive approach to social protection reduces inequality by promoting social mobilities says Paul Ladd, Director, UNRISD. In his view, universality is the way to go because a targeted approach to social protection is hard to target effectively, especially because people do not stay in one place on the social ladder, they move up and down. In conflict areas, social protection cannot be maintained because the situation becomes chaotic, but when it comes to countries affected by conflict, social protection is better than targeted solutions but it requires resources. We have wealth in the world but it is in the hands of a small number of people; if we tax the billionaires and close the tax loopholes on assets then that money can be used to improve health and education. Wendy MacClinchy, Senior Policy Advisor, UNHCR's office in New York, stated that the UNHCR when dealing with protracted displacement, will deliver a comprehensive protection solution which provides support to host government and communities, protection, assistance and self-reliance for refugees, resettlement and complementary pathways and, when conditions allow, voluntary returns. She also emphasized the alignment with the UN commitments to Global Compact on Refugees, and 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. As target 2 of the SDG 10 reads, "By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status." As the main objective of the 2030 agenda is to Leave No One Behind, social protection policies have to cover everyone, everywhere including those most vulnerable.



### **Inequality is Not Accidental is the Message of the Social Development Priority Panel**

Inequality is growing and it is not accidental. Instead it is the result of policies purposefully adopted by nations where inequality is most extreme. This was the data-filled message given by Lucas Chancel in his keynote address to begin the High Level Panel on the Priority Theme of the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development on February 11. As has been reported in other studies, data clearly show that the top 1% of the world's population has captured a huge share of the income growth over the past few decades. The lab's research concludes that the growth in inequality is not the result of globalization but rather the result of policy choices, including the growing role of private capital.

Some of the country by country findings are surprising. Among a subset of the richer countries, Russia was the most equal in 1990 but within just 5 years was one of the most unequal. Data from the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America do not show growth in inequality; this may be because these areas began from such high levels of inequality that they represent an upper limit of inequality.



To reverse the trend toward wealth concentration, investments in health and education to address the needs of the bottom should be made. Progressive taxation is essential but recently, most rich countries and emerging ones have reduced progressive taxation and corporate taxes increasing taxes on the poor and middle class. Significant changes will be needed to address Sustainable Development Goal 10 on reducing inequalities within and between countries. Mr. Chancel is Co-Director of the World Inequality Lab and of the World Inequality Database at the Paris School of Economics. To access more data on inequality, visit <https://wid.world/world-inequality-lab/> The keynote address was followed by comments from panelists from the governments of Belarus, Chile, China, the African Regional Social Protection Leadership Curriculum, the Global Union Federation and the ILO. The panel took place on Monday, February 11 and can be found in the archives of UN WebTV

[Watch here](#)

### **The NGO Committee on Migration: Recent Focus on the U.S.-Mexico Border**

“They did not cross the border, the border crossed them” says Frank Breen, Maryknoll Office for Global Concern.

Our committee is engaged and committed to achieving a better future for all, which includes immigrants or what I call refugees at the US-Mexico border and many of the challenges they face, says the chair of the committee on migration Maria Pia Belloni. On February, 2019, the president of the United States declared emergency because of what he labeled an immigration crisis at the U.S.- Mexico border. Families, mostly from places like Honduras have been trying to

come to the US to apply for asylum. Members of the committee had the opportunity to visit the U.S.-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas and Arizona and reported back to the members about the situation at the border. Kate Garrison visited the border in Arizona, and found three major issues that need more attention: addressing the adverse effects that drive people to leave their countries, lack of access to data and information about the immigration process in the U.S., and the broken detention centers system. If we look at the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), we will find that some of these issues are addressed in objectives 2, 3,13 and 15. Kate added that although it is important to talk about this humanitarian crisis, it is ironic because the U.S. pulled out of the GCM which means we cannot ask for implementing these objectives. Frank Breen who visited El Paso, Texas indicated that the city is considered one of the safest cities in the U.S., 80% of its population are of Latino descent, and a lot of people do not speak English mainly because El Paso used to be part of Mexico. IASSW student representative to the UN Zozan Antar attended the meeting and shared some personal experience about seeking asylum in the U.S., and some of the forces that refugees and asylum seekers have to face. It is important that we recognize that not everyone is leaving their homes because of conflict, some migration is climate induced and therefore we have to focus on good practices







to help find solutions to this humanitarian crisis.

### **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to Meet in March**

This year, CSW63 will take place from Monday, March 11<sup>th</sup> to Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>. It is expected that there will be 9000 women in attendance. The priority theme of this year's CSW is social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The review theme is women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development. There will be a number of intergovernmental high level dialogue panels, such as one on Beijing +25, women's empowerment, access to public services, securing financing, data challenges, and social protection. All of these panels will be taking place either between 10am-1pm and/or 3pm-6pm Eastern Standard Time. You can watch them live on the UN's webtv, or access them later in the archive. IASSW is co-sponsoring a parallel event on Monday, March 11th titled "Social Protection for all Women and Girls: A Life Course Perspective on Policy Options."

The major panels and selected side events will be broadcast on <http://webtv.un.org/>

[CSW 63 Side Events](#)

[CSW 63 Parallel Events](#)





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国際ソーシャルワーク学校連盟

Prepared by:

**Zozan Antar**

MSW Candidate 2020

IASSW Intern Representative to the United Nations

University of Connecticut School of Social Work

Email: [zozan.antar@uconn.edu](mailto:zozan.antar@uconn.edu)

**Kristen Kimmel**

MSW Candidate 2019

IASSW Intern Representative to the United Nations

Fordham University Graduate School of Social Work

Email: [kkimmel@fordham.edu](mailto:kkimmel@fordham.edu)