



**Social protection
in post-2015**

SPEECH (*Free translation to EN*)

**By Maggie De Block, Belgian Minister of Social Affairs and
Public Health**

at

the Conference on “Social Protection in the post-2015 UN Agenda”

Brussels, Monday 27 April 2015

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dames en heren,

Welcome at the Conference on “Social protection in the post-2015 UN agenda”.

2015 is a turning point for the entire world. Within a few months, the Millennium Development Goals end and a new UN agenda will be adopted. The Sustainable Development Goals who are being negotiated, are a unique chance to unite the world for a real transformative, inclusive, integrated and universal agenda. People and also our planet should be central herein. We have to offer our children and the children of our children a poverty-free and sustainable future.

We will probably not attain every Millennium Development Goal, however mankind has made great progress the past decennia. Millions of people have made it out of poverty, diseases were overcome and there was an immense technological progress. But this is not enough. The challenges that we will face in the post-2015 agenda are immense. We are on a historical crossroads and have to face these challenges together to offer hope and progress instead of desperation and frustration.

Social protection is a human right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is crystal-clear: the realization of this human right is vital to guarantee each member of our global society dignity and the free development of his or her personality. In “*A life of dignity for all*” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon identifies social protection as one of the success-factors in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. When set up right, social protection systems

can play an important role for the social, economic, environmental and development dimensions. Social protection is, among other things, an essential tool in the fight against poverty and inequality, important for inclusive and sustainable economic growth and it enhances the resilience against environmental- or other disasters.

Belgium has, in 70 years together with the social partners, built up a very good social protection system. Our qualitative healthcare and social security offer our civilians security when they experience difficulties. But also our excellent Belgian social security system faces great challenges over the next 15 years. The changes in society, the economic crisis, the rising number of chronically ill and the population ageing that is reaching cruising speed, oblige us to adapt our system. But we accept these challenges. And we do not take up these challenges without any basis, but we attend to them based on scientific analyses, “evidence based”. Because a well-designed social protection system, gives us the best guarantee to offer quality and security tomorrow.

Today, worldwide, three quarters of the world’s population is still out in the cold, unprotected. Five billion people have none or insufficient access to basic health care or support when they are unable to obtain a revenue because of ,i.e., unemployment, old age, invalidity or maternity. In the least developed countries, the situation is even more critical. Around 90% of these populations has to live unprotected against all kind of risk. Recently the Ebola virus has shown the dramatic consequences to which poor healthcare can lead. Not having any or an underdeveloped social protection system leaves the door wide open for negative consequences of social, economic and environmental shocks.

In Europe and other parts of the world, in part due to the crisis, we often talk of social protection as a cost. This has to change. Of course solidarity has its price. When a society contributes to help overcome certain social risks, we all have an interest in doing it in the most efficient and effective way. A sustainable system also means that it should remain affordable. It is important that people know that the price they are paying is reasonable, because they can also count on the same solidarity when they need it. A social protection system should be financed in a sustainable way and seen as an investment in everyone's future. It is an investment that indirectly and directly contributes to economic growth. Multiple studies show that most countries have the possibility to use national resources to progressively construct a social protection system. The fact that international aid is necessary for certain countries with less resources is self-evident. For this reason my colleague and Minister of Development Cooperation, Alexander De Croo, has made of the least developed countries a priority for Belgium's development cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are grateful that today we gather representatives of organizations and governments of developing countries and developed countries.

Universality. The post-2015 agenda offers us the unique opportunity to leave behind certain clichés and prejudices: the 'rich' north that has the monopoly of truth, offering the only correct social protection model and the 'poor' south that only asks for help. In our evermore interconnected world, the differences between the north and the south have become more and more obsolete. The progress of countries in South- and Central-America, in Asia and in Africa, on social protection are remarkable. But at the same time we also see the world changer through the growing "south-south" cooperation. Each different

country tries, with their own methods and context, to develop their own social protection system. Innovation plays an important role herein. Nowadays, there are countries in full development that are trying to link, in an innovative way, social benefits to education for children, respect for the environment or to a combination of training with a guarantee of work afterwards. Every country can learn from others when it comes to different innovative methods. Today, we would love to give a platform to exchange ideas together.

We are entirely convinced of the importance of a central place for social protection and health care in the post-2015 agenda. However, we cannot forget to be realistic. The report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals proposes 17 goals and 169 targets. Just like Rome, a social protection system cannot be built in one day and has to be seen in the context of all other priorities. But, it is possible. The foundations of Recommendation 202 of the International Labor Organization concerning 'National Protection Floors' form a realistic starting point for all countries. It is not expected that Rome will be built at once and simultaneous all over the world. There is no "one-size-fits-all" formula for countries with different needs, priorities and fiscal space. Every country has to determine their own national social protection floor that contains the minimum standards and covers all citizens. Afterwards the system can be expanded step by step in the direction of a complete social protection.

Whatever the weather, we have to act together to guarantee that every goal of the post-2015 framework can be achieved, including social protection for all. Without a strong cooperation within and outside the UN system, the world is doomed to fail from beforehand in achieving these goals. Today we are with 7 billion people on this planet and in 2030 we will be with more than 8 billion:

there is evidently a need for cooperation between every organization that works around social protection and for the exchange of information and success stories.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The principles of universality, progressivity and pluralism are central at this conference and the starting point is the cry for more cooperation. Social protection brings hope and confidence to people worldwide. With this conference we hope to bring the debate further, in the light of the post-2015 negotiations, to enhance the cooperation between and within countries, but also between international organizations and with the civil society. This way, this conference can hopefully contribute to bringing hope.

I thank you.