



**Social protection
in post-2015**

SPEECH

**By Nils Behrndt, Head of Cabinet, on behalf of
Commissioner Mimica**

at

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

Brussels, Monday 27 April 2015

[Mr/Madam President/Chairman]

Minister,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Commissioner Mimica, I would like to congratulate the Government of Belgium for organising this conference on social protection.

Social protection lies at the heart of Europe's own values. Our vision is that of an **inclusive society which leaves no one behind**.

It is this same vision which Europe should follow for our **partner countries**. And which should build the foundation of the future post-2015 agenda. The agenda which will shape our development cooperation in the next 15 years.

But let me first take a step back: The **Millennium Development Goals** that the world community agreed in the year 2000, have contributed to reach unprecedented progress. Most remarkably, the target of halving extreme poverty rates was met already in 2010, five years ahead of the deadline.

Yet, the international community still faces tremendous challenges. Over 200 million people are unemployed, including growing numbers of young people. More than 700 million do not have access to safe drinking water. More than 800 million people suffer from hunger. 1.2 billion people still live in extreme poverty. And 5 billion people do not have access to adequate social protection. At the same time, our planet's natural resources are in decline, putting food and energy security at risk. And the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss are visible day by day.

Business as usual is not an option. It is not an option *within* Europe. And it is not an option at a *global scale* either. The current Millennium Development Goals had their successes. But if the global community wants to effectively address the massive challenges we are facing, we need a more ambitious and bolder approach.

The **post-2015 development agenda**, with the **Sustainable Development Goals** at its core, is the key opportunity to agree on such approach. There is strong consensus that this agenda will have to go beyond “traditional” development challenges. That the agenda needs to address the three dimensions of sustainability in an integrated way, namely economic, social and environmental development.

This is a necessary **paradigm shift**, which should allow us to address the challenges facing the world today.

Take one extremely important example: **inequalities**, both within and among countries. Economic growth has not led to improvements in the well-being of *all* citizens. To the contrary, we are witnessing increasing inequality with regard to income and other factors. The majority of the extreme poor today live in middle income countries.

To address this worrying trend, it is important that a **specific goal on inequality** has been proposed. High inequality is detrimental to growth and has adverse effects on social and political stability.

In its own development cooperation, the **European Union** is firmly committed to supporting smart, inclusive and sustainable growth. We want a **decent life for**

all. In practical terms this means seeking to address basic needs and rights of the world's poorest people.

In this context, **social protection has a critical role to play.** This becomes clear if we look at the current Millennium Development Goals. Even if social protection is not a specific goal or target, it has substantial impacts in supporting at least six of the eight goals by promoting universal access to key essential services such as basic and maternal health care, education, nutrition and environmental health.

Since its 2012 Communication on **Social Protection in EU Development Cooperation** the European Commission has called for nationally-owned social protection policies. We have stepped up our cooperation with over 16 countries and with a financial commitment of over EUR 400 million. These programmes support the development of national social protection systems providing universal access to nationally defined social protection floors and delivering better protection for all people throughout their life.

The European Union and its Member States have also been actively involved in raising the profile of social protection in the **global debate**, including in the process of elaborating the post-2015 development agenda. **Belgium has played a particularly prominent role in this advocacy.** And I would like to commend Belgium for this leading role, which is confirmed by today's conference.

We now have a proposal of 17 **Sustainable Development Goals** and 169 associated targets on the table. **Social protection features** as a potential target for several of the proposed Goals, such as those on ending poverty in all its forms, on achieving gender equality, on reducing inequality and on ensuring healthy lives.

These targets need to be supported by solid **indicators**. Most critical though is that the goals and targets are **effectively implemented**. Many international standards on social protection exist already. The post-2015 agenda will add further goals and targets. But the key challenge will be to operationalize their implementation, to monitor progress and, where necessary, review how we try to achieve these ambitions.

This will require political will across the globe, a solid and transparent methodology, as well as strong support from various partners. In this context, allow me to express our appreciation for the efforts of our development partners in the framework of the **Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board**.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The post-2015 agenda is not just targeting developing countries. It will be a **universal agenda** calling upon action in the developing countries as well as the developed countries alike. In the European Union, we strongly believe that decent work and social protection are the most effective means of achieving an inclusive society and of overcoming inequality and poverty. Social protection has been key to build up resilience over the crisis period in Europe. But we need to continue innovating and finding new ways of delivering high levels of social protection for all.

I wish you a successful conference which will provide key input for the ongoing reflections how to further strengthen social protection in Europe and world-wide.

Thank you for your attention.

