8 CHAPTER EIGHT
COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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PURVIEW OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The United Nations Committee for Social Development (CSocD) is an ancillary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is charged to advise ECOSOC on issues of social development and other social areas not covered by technical and specialized agencies of the United Nations. It covers issues ranging from protections for families and youth development to the rights of the disabled and the rights of indigenous peoples. It also examines issues of social cohesion and support for civil society. The Commission meets on an annual basis.

Website: http://undesadspd.org/commissionforsocialdevelopment.aspx

STATUS OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH

The United Nations generally defines youth as people between the ages of 15 and 24. Youth is a critical time for individual development, as individuals complete school, create new households, form families and find their first adult employment. Young people also play a critical role in their societies. When the needs of youth are met, they can serve as drivers of economic growth, developers of new ideas and engaged, active citizens in their communities. When the needs of youth are not met, it can create unrest, stagnate economies and tear the fabric of societies.

While the United Nations has long recognized the importance of young people, the issue has come into clearer focus in recent years. Youth unemployment was a major challenge for the European economies both before and after the 2008 financial crisis, and the high rates of youth unemployment continue to be a challenge. Youth were widely viewed as the drivers of the revolutions of the Arab Spring, which toppled governments across the Middle East and North Africa. Youth protests against economic and education policies in Latin America have created challenges for governments across the region. And in Asia, youth are driving the economic transformations of China, India and others. Today, there are approximately 1 billion youth ages 15 to 24 globally, and more than 3 billion are under the age of 30. The youth population in most countries will peak in the decades ahead, creating a narrow

demographic window for States to "lock in" policies that create good livelihoods for their youth populations. Failing to do so will be a drag on the economy and hurt social cohesion for years to come—especially as many countries experience challenges related to aging populations in the next thirty years.

The General Assembly first acknowledged the role of youth in 1965 when they drafted the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples. The modern focus on youth began when the General Assembly declared 1985 the International Youth Year. It drew international attention to the important role young people play in the world, and, in particular, their potential contribution to development. A decade later in 1995, the General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, which aimed to guide the policies and programs of Member States aimed at empowering and supporting youth in ten priority areas.

Between 2005 and 2007, Member States completed a ten-year review of the World Programme and ultimately agreed to add five priorities and to expand upon these areas in the Supplement to the World Programme of Action for Youth. The fifteen areas of focus are education; employment; hunger and poverty; health; environment; substance abuse; juvenile justice; leisure-time activities; girls and young women; the full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making; as well as globalization; information and communication technologies; HIV/AIDS; armed conflict; and inter-generational issues.

While Member States have agreed upon the importance of supporting youth in principle, the issue is still highly political. Because the needs of youth are intrinsically linked to national economic and social development policies, Member States are frequently wary of outside interference with national policies regarding youth. In some instances, the needs and demands of youth collide uncomfortably with social norms and laws. Young women and girls frequently seek education and employment opportunities that are prohibited by custom or law. This can have severe repercussions, as the Malala Yousafzai case demonstrated. In other instances, the inclusion of youth voices in the political process may introduce instability and dissent. Increased youth voices in policy deliberations may advance ideas that current governments oppose. At

the 2010 World Youth Congress, the youth recommendations called for decreased military spending and dramatic increases in education and social welfare spending.

In 2009, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2010 the International Year of Youth. This generated a renewed focus on youth issues, with major summits held in Turkey and Mexico. In December 2011, the United Nations Secretariat Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) convened experts and developed quantitative indicators for the World Programme of Action. These are crucial tools for Member States to assess progress in supporting youth development. The group also determined that the 15 priority areas could be grouped into three priority clusters: youth and the global economy; youth and civil society; and youth and their well-being. In January 2012, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that youth engagement would be a major priority in his five-year plan for the United Nations Secretariat. He subsequently appointed a new Envoy on Youth, whose mandate includes raising the profile of youth issues, advocating on behalf of youth and supporting youth development at the United Nations.

Today, the United Nations technical and specialized agencies play a critical role in addressing many of the problems facing youth: the International Labour Organization works substantially on youth unemployment; the World Health Organization works to improve youth health outcomes and prevent HIV/AIDS; and the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, and the United Nations Children's Fund both work to support access to education. Yet the primary responsibility for meeting the needs of youth falls on the Member States. Frequently, support from the United Nations comes in evaluation, policy planning and occasionally in the execution of programs.

Despite the increase in attention and a renewed focus on supporting youth by Member States, the challenges facing young people continue. Youth unemployment remains high, particularly in Europe and the Middle East and North Africa, despite efforts by Member States, the United Nations and its technical and specialized agencies. So far, Member States have not found sufficient solutions to this challenge. In many instances, Member States may need to consider new economic policies that create opportunities for young people, though these policies may have other, more negative impacts on other parts of the economy. In a recent global assessment by the Secretariat, young people have identified education as their most pressing need. The number of illiterate and innumerate continues to grow around the world, largely driven by conflicts that prevent youth from attending school and getting an education. Finally, dissatisfaction among youth continues to rise in many areas around the world, and young people are seeking a stronger role in governance at the local, national and international level. The strong youth interest at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) demonstrates how youth are lobbying for a greater voice in deciding the future of the world at every level.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:
- What are the major concerns facing young people in your country? How have you worked to meet them?
- How has the United Nations supported youth development efforts around the world, and are there ways to adapt its programming to meet present concerns?
- How can the United Nations address the youth unemployment crisis?

- How should the United Nations include youth voices, and what recommendations would assist Member States in integrating youth into governance structures?

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION CONCERNING DISABLED PERSONS

Defined as "the consequence of an impairment that may be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, developmental, or some combination of these," disabilities affect over a billion people across the globe. The disabled are entitled to the same rights as all other human beings and to equal opportunities. Too often their lives are handicapped by physical and social barriers in society, which hamper their full participation. The World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons was adopted in 1982 as a global strategy for protecting persons with disabilities in a social and national context. The United Nations continues to implement the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons to better provide this large and growing population demographic with the opportunities and human rights they deserve.

The call for an international standard of rights concerning disabled persons emerged out of the existing United Nations Charter. While documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights applied to the disabled, it did not explicitly cite their needs within its text. Because of this, work on the rights of disabled persons focus on social support and on preventative health issues. This shift began with the adoption in 1971 of the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons. At the forefront of this document was the guarantee that the mentally disabled were to be afforded all of the same rights and freedoms possible given their respective condition. Also included in the document were protections for access to health care and treatment. Throughout the Declaration was a message of protection and empowerment: the mentally disabled were to be treated as any other member of society so far as they could participate. Importantly, the Declaration specified that any rights of the mentally disabled curtailed by States could only be done after a legal review; the decision of the State must also be regularly reviewed and subject to appeal.

Building on its earlier work, the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons in 1975. The Declaration set out to define the term "disabled person," affirming the rights of persons with disabilities and strengthening the 1971 Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons. As with other international documents on this issue, the focus remains on preventing disabilities; providing rehabilitation for those affected; and ensuring a more free and equal society in which to live. The General Assembly further proclaimed 1981 as the International Year for Disabled Persons, with the theme "full participation." The goals of the International Year were to encourage research on disability issues including transportation systems and infrastructure, encourage full integration into society and educate and inform the public as to the rights of disabled persons.

The International Year of Disabled Persons, 1981, was followed by the adoption of the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (WPA) in 1982. The WPA encourages all States, no matter their level of development, to work with a strong sense of urgency to prevent disability, provide rehabilitation and eliminate obstacles to the full participation of disabled persons in social life. Some of the most important measures for prevention of impairment in the WPA include avoidance of war; improvement of the educational, economic and social status of the least privileged groups; and identification of types of common impairment. It also encourages States to take steps to detect symptoms and signs of impairment as early as possible and to follow immediately with the necessary curative or remedial action, which can prevent disability or at least lead to significant reductions in the severity of disability. In all rehabilitation efforts, emphasis should be placed on the abilities of the individual, whose integrity and dignity must be respected. Prevention is not a panacea, however. Despite preventive efforts, there will always be a number of people with impairments and disabilities, and societies have to identify and remove obstacles to their full participation. The General Assembly adopted two more key documents in the following decades. The first was the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (Standard Rules), adopted in 1993. These twenty-two rules summarize the message of the WPA and serve as the basis for policy-making and technical cooperation. And in 2006, the international community formally agreed on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Countries that join in the Convention commit themselves to develop and carry out policies, laws and administrative measures for securing the rights recognized in the Convention and abolish laws, regulations, customs

and practices that constitute discrimination. As of July 2014, it has been signed or ratified by 158 Member States.

The Standard Rules mandate the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) supervise their implementation. CSocD has named three Special Rapporteurs on disability since 1994, and their reports continue the recent discussion of this topic as a human rights issue, with more recent reports encouraging States to sign the Convention and integrate respect for the rights of the disabled in development programs, domestic and international. CSocD is especially concerned about the lack of reporting and data collection on the issue.

While it is encouraging that steps have been taken by the international community to promote the well-being of persons with disabilities in their own nations and internationally, there remain many challenges. There is strong correlation between poverty and impairment; the birth of a disabled child often forces a family further into destitution. In those States where there is already great pressure on their social welfare system, or where there is a lack of adequate medical care, this often means that children with disabilities are abandoned by their families. Even today, the birth of a disabled child can be perceived as a curse or a punishment, depending on various social customs and belief systems.

Looking ahead, the Commission should consider some of the following issues. First, the Commission might consider how effectively the Convention is being implemented by States Parties and what steps might encourage non-States Parties to ratify the Convention. Enshrining the principles of equality in national law and in national policies is crucial to the success of the Convention. Second, there is a significant gap in data concerning disabled persons. Data collection is vital to ensuring an accurate global understanding of the scope of the issue and to better understand how the international community can better work on the national and local levels to speak specifically to their needs. A global monitoring mechanism and the ability for information-sharing would be critical in this; the United Nations has encouraged non-governmental organizations to partner with Member States in this to achieve this goal. Third, the Commission should consider how to encourage equitable access to education. Education can both empower the disabled as well as improve their treatment and opportunities. Fears and stigmas about the disabled remain; efforts at educating populations about prevention, rehabilitation, and empowerment as envisioned in the WPA must extend to rural areas to combat these attitudes. Finally, the body should consider how these goals could be integrated with the upcoming debate and design of the post-2015 development goals.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:
- How effectively is the Convention being implemented, and how can the Commission improve implementation?
- How can Member States support equitable access to education for disabled persons?
- What specific data could improve the global understanding of the situation faced by the disabled?
- How might the rights of the disabled be integrated within the post-2015 development goals?

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