

WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, 2011

World Day Of Social Justice, observed this year on Feb. 20, is an urgent call for all countries to take decisive and concrete steps to promote the UN's mission for, human rights, human well being and human dignity. The recent astonishing and historic events in the Middle East testify to the crucial importance of social justice.

This year's UN meeting emphasized the need for all people to have social protection. . Currently, 80 percent of the global population does *not* have a set of social guarantees that provides protection from many of daily life-risks. It has become more and more obvious that women are particularly vulnerable to daily risks in their lives. The necessity of a level and egalitarian social protection floor is very clear: No one should have to live below a certain income level and all people should have access to basic health services, primary education, housing, water and sanitation. Numerous studies have found that a basic social floor is globally affordable. Amazingly, it can be achieved with an investment of around 2 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Why is this important? Social justice is more than an ethical imperative, it is a vital foundation for national stability and global progress.

A few months ago the UN Security Council, which usually deals with war and security, held an unusual day-long high-level meeting on the root causes that fuel conflict in the world; Poverty and lack of development. The discussion centered on the fact that peace, security, human rights and development are all interdependent. Recent events in the Middle East are a sharp reminder of the need for political stability to be anchored in economic opportunity together with a decent standard of living.

Nine of the ten countries with the lowest human development indicators have experienced conflict in the last 20 years. Countries facing stark inequalities and weak institutions are at increased risk of conflict. Poorly distributed wealth and a lack of sufficient jobs, opportunities and freedoms, particularly for a large youth population, is fertile ground for conflict. The turmoil in the Middle East is a potent example of what the Security Council is talking about. Justice matters!

Unfortunately public spending, particularly in richer countries, are on the chopping block around the world. A new UN report demonstrates that social security is not only the most effective tool to reduce poverty and tackling inequality, but, that it is globally affordable. Poorer countries are developing innovative techniques for insuring that their citizens have basic security.

On the occasion of World Day of Social Justice the ILO (the UN International Labor Organization) released a report providing many examples of successful social protection experiences. Some examples are presented below.:

BRAZIL'S BOLSA FAMILIA: A conditional cash transfer scheme which covers 26 percent of the population, 50 million people and has contributed one third to the decline in income inequality. Families commit to keeping their children in school and taking them for regular health checks. Success has sparked adaptations in almost 20 countries.

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ARGENTINA'S UNIVERSAL CHILD ALLOWENCE PROGRAMME: covers 85 percent of Argentine children and is credited with reducing poverty by 22 percent and extreme poverty by 42 percent .

MEXICO'S CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME: reaches 25 percent of the population and contributed to an 11 percent reduction in maternal mortality and a 2 percent reduction in infant mortality and gains in education and nutrition.

INDIA'S NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME: This inovative program offers 100 days of guaranteed work per family at a minimum wage in rural areas. This scheme provides jobs for 34 million households at a cost of only 3 tenth of one percent of GDP.

Many of the programs need an investment of less the one percent of GDP. Importantly, local participation is involved and provides money directly to the people in need.

In the past, most governments have considered social protection as a cost. More recently they have adopted a longer term perspective that views such expenditures as an investment- (and not as a cost) which in the end can bring rich social, economic and political dividends.

Social protection is not only the moral thing to do, it is also the wise thing to do!

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