

Intervention

By Counsellor Mohamed Khalil

Permanent Mission of Egypt to the UN

For the 8th meeting of the Open Working Group

On Sustainable Development Goals

Oceans and seas, Forests and Biodiversity

Equality, Social Equity, Gender equality and Women empowerment

Conflict Prevention, Post-conflict peacebuilding, promotion of durable peace, rule of law and governance

3rd – 7th February 2014

A. Equality

- 1- Sustainable development cannot be achieved while ignoring extreme disparities. It is imperative that the post-MDG agenda have as one of its central points a focus on inequality.
- 2- Addressing the trend of exacerbating income inequality across diverse regions and levels of development needs to be not only an urgent but also a core foundation for SDGs and the Post-2015 development agenda. Equity is an important ingredient of social cohesion and development.
- 3- A fundamental policy reorientation is undeniably necessary. Addressing socioeconomic inequality calls for reversing the persistent decline of the share of labour in aggregate national income in most countries over the last three decades. This requires a rethinking of the principles underlying the design of national economic policy and supportive international institutional arrangements.
- 4- Inequitable income distribution in many countries both developed and developing must be analysed in the context of the macroeconomic, financial and labour market policies adopted over the last several decades. Those policies have led to a systematic mis-alignment where the rate of wage growth has lagged behind the rate of productivity growth.
- 5- It is argued that the shifts towards financial and trade liberalisation have driven unemployment to rise and remain high. The current global trend on fiscal austerity and the lack of political will to employ redistributive tax policies not only causes an economy to contract, but also creates greater inequality in the distribution of income.
- 6- Establishing a level playing field between labour and capital can be achieved through various means, including a shift towards wage-led growth, regulation of international financial markets and capital movements, more equitable tax policies and prevention of tax competition. This calls for breaking the dominance of finance and corporate interests in the formulation of policies and operations in global markets.

- 7- The fact that different dimensions of inequality are related suggests that focusing on one dimension at a time may underestimate the true magnitude of societal inequalities and provide an inadequate basis for policy. For example, health inequality is both a cause and consequence of income inequality. Inequalities in education are a primary determinant of inequalities in income and opportunity. Perhaps the worst dimension of inequality is **inequality of opportunity**, which is both cause and consequence of inequality of outcomes, and causes economic inefficiency and reduced development. Inequality of opportunity is reflected in a lack of socio-economic mobility, condemning those born into the bottom of the economic pyramid to almost surely remain there.
- 8- Studies show that income inequality among countries is higher than within countries. There should be international action to reverse the trend and thus to reduce international inequality.

B. Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

- 1- MDGs provided unprecedented opportunities to reduce the existing forms of inequalities, in particular gender inequalities. A considerable progress has been achieved around the world in areas of health, education, economic and political participation. However, this progress didn't meet the expected outcome results, as persistent forms of inequalities still exist.
- 2- Gender inequalities in all sectors and societies remain an obstacle to achieve sustainable development. It is important to identify some priority areas under this goal, to include violence against women, equal access to opportunities and resources, participation across the full range of decision-making arenas, as well as mainstreaming gender perspective across all goals.
- 3- Integrating gender equality and the empowerment of women in the new framework of development goals is not enough. It has to be translated into concrete actions to be implemented at all levels. These actions shall include the urgent need to overcome gender stereotypes, including by ensuring that educational materials portray women and men, youth, girls and boys in positive and non-discriminatory roles.
- 4- We stress the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for women in the labor market, and equal access for girls in education, as well as recognizing the need to reconciliation of work and family requirements for both women and men, and the principle of shared parental responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children.
- 5- In our view, the interpretation of sexual and reproductive rights as including abortion or promoting LGBT issues is not acceptable. While we are shaping sustainable development goals, we shall focus on what can bring us to consensus. The inclusion of concepts, ideas, rights, or values that are not agreed upon within the internationally recognized human rights framework will not help in achieving consensus in this regard. Repeating references to those issues, goes beyond what has been agreed upon in the Cairo Declaration of the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 and its follow-up. Such controversial issues cannot be part of a sustainable development goals consensus.
- 6- In Egypt measures to ensure equality between women and men, as well as women empowerment, and women full enjoyment of political, economic, social and

cultural rights are enshrined in the recently amended constitution. According to the constitution, the State shall take measures to ensure adequate representation of women in parliament, guarantee women the right to hold public office and senior management positions in the state and in the recruitment agencies and judicial bodies without discrimination, and protect women against all forms of violence and enable them to ensure the success of their duties in both the family and the work place.

- 7- The rights of persons with disabilities are enshrined in the new constitution as well. It stresses the equality of all citizens before the Law, without discrimination on any basis, including disability. It emphasizes that the State shall cater for the needs of persons with disabilities. It ensures appropriate representation of persons with disabilities in the parliament, in accordance with the law.