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International Council on Social Welfare

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## Working Together for a Better ICSW



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Dear fellow ICSW members, friends, and interested readers,

Now at the beginning of summer 2021, fatigued by the COVID-19 pandemic, we are eager to return to what was once normal, to how things once were, to our life. Yet, as in all major catastrophes, what is to come is not what once was. Nor are we the same as we were three years ago. For me, this pandemic has marked the true beginning of the 21st century. Yes, we keep plugging on, pushed by the inertia of the past, it is true: our societies continue to be capitalist where the logic of profit, commercial interests, and exchange are a common language across the planet, as Branco Milanovic points out in his book *Capitalism, Alone* (2019). We continue to be immersed in a fast-paced process of digitalization, while globalization has also increased in speed, and the virus is among us. It

has not been the first virus, nor will it be the last. However, what has changed, what is emerging as a novelty in this third decade of the 21st century, is precisely the priority of 'care'.

From caring for nature to what is called compassionate care for the terminally ill, care policies are making headway in a society that is rediscovering collaboration as a survival strategy, and care as a relational model among subjects with rights, among our fellow citizens. From the perspective of care, in the sense of the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, we are discovering an outer reality that resists our desires, one with its own dignity, and whose trajectory must be articulated in consonance with our own through processes of cooperation, collaboration, and co-design. Exclusionary dilemmas (nature vs. us, our benefit vs. that of others) do not help us to address common problems. Denial of the other is not a tenable strategy, because we are the others.

In this regard, care—as a novel approach or paradigm, as a new point of departure—coexists with one of the tendencies of the 20th century: a movement toward affirmation of the self and denial of the other, the exaltation of communities closed in on themselves, a defense of the collective bubbles in which we live, and which find their strength in social networks. A decisive challenge for the 21st century revolves around choosing which of the two options should be a priority, almost in ontological terms: will exclusionary and identity-based dynamics take priority (where the tendency is to deny the

legitimacy of the other), or will we redefine our relationships and our administrations by making care a priority?

Care has always existed. We are not who 'we are' because we do (in the Marxist sense) or because we live in the city (in the Aristotelian sense). If we look at our life trajectories from birth, the reality is quite different. We are who we are because we were cared for, because we care, and because we will be cared for. Social welfare and care professionals (from health to social workers) are a good point of reference to articulate a discourse on care as a basic element of human identity. Care involves dissent and competition, but also solidarity and altruism. And we can also confront, why not say it, the conflicts that plague our personal lives and our coexistence with those who, being equals, sometimes love us badly, only love themselves, and consider us standing reserves to be put on order and available on demand for their own interests or benefit (in the sense of Heidegger's *Bestand*).

In the social services, like in health or education, care policies require developing an ethics of care centered on citizens' life paths. We cannot limit ourselves to simply handing out benefits, or processing forms on our users requested by other administrations. The social services of the 21st century must be based on co-design, co-participation, involvement, and cooperation. Indeed, care requires a holistic vision that goes beyond merely providing services in a timely fashion to take account of the trajectories of people, groups, and communities. In short, care takes us to that external reality, be it nature or our fellow citizens. It is a reality with its own identity that we must not ignore, and which entails defining, assessing, and resolving problems that affect everyone.

Care emphasizes the value of cooperation and dignity; an essential manner of thinking to cope with dissent and conflict without letting us be carried away by denial of the other. If we must choose a perspective, a gaze, a point of view, care policies allow us a more realistic and more effective way to reconcile our personal lives with the superdiverse society in which we live. The present and future of our societies and the specific configuration of our social welfare system will depend on the choice we make on this issue (prioritizing care and citizens or, on the contrary, prioritizing our own approach and delegitimizing the rest). It is important that we redefine our social services now to take care of ourselves. And let us hope that our fellow citizens will take care of us in the future with social services fit for the 21st century.

Care policies are an essential part of ICSW's identity. Since 1928, we have been working to strengthen social welfare in countries around the world, and we work to put social welfare priorities on the public agenda at the local, regional, and global level. In this sense, social welfare and care encompass both care politics, as a global orientation for our societies, and care policies, which are the specific measures regarding the provision of care. In my view, the role that the ICSW should play is clear: to contribute to the social welfare and inclusion of our fellow citizens.

Within these dynamics of care, it is important for all ICSW members and regions to work together as a team. For this reason, I would like to thank our colleagues from the region of MENA region, who have sent us different articles where they share their projects and aspirations. My heartfelt thanks go out to all of you for making possible this cooperative project and a better ICSW for the 21st century.

**Take care and stay healthy!**

### The Four Lessons of the Covid-19 Pandemic



***Driss Guerraoui, MENA Region President of International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW)***

The 2020 crisis, generated by the Covid19 pandemic, is a unique crisis in terms of its nature, its scope, its time duration, its geographical spread, its modes of manifestation, its complexity and its impacts on human, social, economic, financial, cultural, ecological, psychological and existential levels. It has enabled us, on an individual and group basis, as well as on the scale of territories, nations and continents, to realize the fragility and vulnerability of the world.

It also highlighted the fact that if we wish to survive, we should drastically change our attitude to life, to Nature, to Time and to Technologies. It also made us more sensitive to the necessity of thinking in a different light about the uncertainties, the risks and the unforeseen and recurring events of disasters, of extreme phenomena and of the pandemics, as well as the need to integrate the management of these emergency situations into our public policies.

From these constant objectives was born the generalized belief that we must, on the scale of each country and on the world level, change our

development patterns by altering our modes of productions, of consumption, of trade and of cooperation. To achieve this goal, we must change our national priorities, as well as our economic, ecological, social as well as cultural interactions, on the basis of a shared set of common values integrating the real cost of a human lifestyle (citizenship, responsibility, solidarity, and sharing), along with sustainability, dignity, and creativity.

These changes, which have now become essential, and perhaps even compelling, can only take place if we keep on considering them from analytical grids, prisms and solutions derived from current economic, social, political and cultural systems.

We are, therefore, called to think the new world based on new paradigms. We must therefore prepare ourselves and our societies for a true political, cultural and mental revolution.

Nation-States, international and regional institutions, citizens, companies, and territorial actors must all be actors, while remaining permanently vigilant, mobilized, and determined to succeed in this revolution, which is indispensable for building the post-crisis world of 2020.

To do so, this revolution must necessarily be carried out by a new generation of leaders and governance, on the local, national and international scale, more responsible and united, capable of contributing to the realization of the global agendas of human development, climate, migration, the fight against organized crime, terrorism and radicalism in all its forms.

At all these levels, never has a crisis shown so much how the generalization of the universal social protection base, which has been on the

International Labor Organization's agenda since the Bachelet Report of 2012, and of basic medical coverage, which is one of its essential components, and the implementation of a universal basic income for all, have never been so vital to fight human distress, social fractures, extreme poverty, and the glaring vulnerabilities that affect, throughout the world, large sections of the people left behind by society, and that we have observed during this crisis.

In addition, in terms of comparative analysis of national strategies to combat the pandemic,<sup>19</sup> it is worth noting that the countries that have succeeded in managing this crisis in an appropriate manner are those that are distinguished by the existence of four characteristics

-A Strong national state, with a leader who commands public popularity and legitimate political authority: This institutional framework produced trust in the government and in the people. Such an institutional context has provided the confidence and the consensus that are essential, on either side, to the unanimous, willing, accountable, well-organized and mastered adhesion of all participants and forces in such countries to the agreed-upon public strategies, and on the other hand, to the mobilization of collective intelligence and national expertise to locally produce the required medical equipment for the struggle against this pandemic;

-The presence in society of a Civic Awareness that has led to citizenship behaviors among all the national community's components, allowing citizens to interact with public vision of the management of emergencies, thereby conciliating between freedom and responsibility;

-A dynamic in society, which has made possible a

functional complementarity between the State, the territories, the companies, and the actors of civil society. These dynamics have revitalized the society's values of solidarity and self-help at both central and territorial levels;

And last, but not least, a national scientific and research system in the field of medicine and healthcare, as well as drug and medical device production industries. Such a system and industries have made possible a Strategic Watch and proactive behavior from decision-makers, corporations, and direct managers of public policies against the pandemic, and also contributed to an optimal use of the opportunities brought by digital economics and digital leadership of the crisis.

On a separate level, this crisis yields at least four messages for future governing strategies on major structural issues of human development: the crisis of 2020 is a crisis of the global economic, social, and political system, not a crisis in the system.

In fact, the objective assessment and analysis of the crisis of 2020 revealed that it is a full-blown economic, social and Political systems failure and not a system failure. Therefore, it is not the classical reforms of economic recovery that it will require in order to be overcome, but rather significant changes and a fundamental break with the system that must be operated in the heart of the system.

These shifts and breaks must be structured around four essential axes:

#### 1- **A Radical Change of the Development Paradigm**

Actually, the first conclusion of the 2020 crisis is

that the national models of Development are at stake. On this level, the current crisis has clearly demonstrated that the existing models throughout the world have already reached their limits and are driving us to a stalemate and to an unreliable world. Therefore, all states, all societies and economies are called upon, firstly, to drastically change their production, consumption, distribution, exchange and cooperation patterns, and secondly, to rethink their priorities based on the vital requirements of their peoples, businesses and their territories.

## **2- The necessary overhaul of global governance of Crisis**

This second lesson lies at the core of the anarchy, the disorder and the chaos of the global management of the crises. Such governance is not accountable, not united, nor is it shared, and it does not generate harmonious, convergent and well-coordinated actions in terms of the strategies to combat the spread of pandemics, disasters and conflicts. If this situation remains, it will have a serious impact on the human Security as a result.

In this respect, it is clear that, during this covid19 pandemic, the main global authorities, with a few rare exceptions where the geopolitical intention is obvious, have missed their historic engagements. They got bogged down in a selfish local management of the Pandemic, excluding continents and populations in sub-human and degrading social, health and materiel situations.

Given this state of affairs, the global system is in need of a radical restructuring of the Security Council and of all the international and Regional organizations of the United Nations network. This perspective is dictated by two major new

developments. First, the multi-polar nature of the world realities of the 21st century, in which we are facing, on one hand, a decline of the old Western world powers, which still have the lion's share in the United Nations Security Council and in the other international and regional specialized organizations, and, on the other hand, the rise of the new economic, military and technology power that has a strong influence on the course of world events and on the intricate interplay of international relations.

It is also dictated by what the international community has to deal with in terms of managing new generations of war, pandemics and human and natural disasters, in addition to the economic, social, environmental and security challenges that the world system is already facing.

These challenges, these issues, and these insecurities show and demonstrate that today, more than ever, the Peoples and their States have an urgent need for a new and true global governance. This governance must, however, be based on effective and permanent multilateral crisis management, and be carried by a unified and efficient institutional leadership, ensuring the permanent coordination of all international issues, which are the objective of the different mandates and agendas of the United Nations. Achieving security, peace, stability, human progress, and sustainable development depends greatly on this. It is only through this that global human security will be preserved and it is through this new governance that the interests of future generations will be truly guaranteed.

## **3- Rehabilitate and enhance the place of science, knowledge and culture in society**

The third lesson lies in the fact that this crisis has also had an impact on society, and even on our

lives. Indeed, the crisis of 2020 has revealed and awakened to the citizens of the world the vulnerability of the human condition and the limits of existence. Since then, millions of people, and not necessarily those in the literate category, have begun to question the meaning of their existence, and to think about their conditions of (survival), questioning the objective incapacity of Man and the political, economic and social systems in place to overcome the uncertainties, hazards, natural disasters, pandemics and new post-industrial risks driven by the emergence of wars of a new kind looming on the horizon. In doing so, it is not only the elites, but the peoples of the world who are beginning to pose the great question, that has always plagued the imagination of individuals, communities and nations since antiquity, which is: what kind of world do we want and can we afford to live in tomorrow? And what kind of society projects must we reconstruct in the future?

This new deal has impelled, at an unsuspected speed and in real time, a worldwide movement aiming at thinking differently about the common destiny of mankind. But, what is specific to this approach is that it has generated the pressing need for a re-reading of the relationship between knowledge, science, philosophy and beliefs, on the one hand, and between law, politics and religion, on the other. This puts human societies in a phase of unprecedented transition at the level of thought, transporting them from a "confinement" enclosing them in an aspiration to a return to the sources of beliefs and fundamentalisms in all its forms, to an era based on the imperative renewal of sciences and the appeal to the lights of philosophy. Enlightened minds and ruling elites must take advantage of this emerging mutation to unleash the creative energies of their societies, in order to inscribe this dynamic within the framework of a cultural

revolution that will accompany the new development models to be created. This is why it is of the utmost importance to rehabilitate and enhance the place of science, knowledge and culture in our societies.

#### 4- **Preserving life and Human value through ecology**

Finally, the fourth lesson is about the connection between the economic and social model inherited from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the climate disruption and the rise of new pandemics. Indeed, the prevailing economic and social model, throughout the world since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, centered on the priority granted to *productivism* and consumerism, has resulted in an unbridled overexploitation of agricultural, fishing, forestry, water and mining resources on a planetary scale, causing irreversible changes in the Human-Nature balance. This unbalance is increasing year after year due to energy and technological choices that are particularly destructive to nature and to life in general.

Moreover, this overexploitation is worsened by: i) a galloping demography, ii) the unlimited pursuit of economic competition between the old powers and the emerging ones, vying for the commercial, technological and military leadership of the world, iii) and a national and global management of development issues, with a few exceptions of countries and communities/ unconcerned with the necessary equilibrium to be achieved and maintained between the Earth and the humans, for the safeguarding of the biodiversity of the natural ecosystems, and the preservation of the world's vegetal and animal heritage.

Undoubtedly, as proven by many serious independent studies, it is the disruption of these balances that is at the root of the development of

new generations of food, water and energy insecurity, and their consequences on the epidemiological evolution of the world, as well as on the increase in natural disasters, extreme phenomena and climate migrations. Recurrent droughts and floods, deforestation, desertification, erosion of land, melting glaciers, the extinction of animal and plant species, the instability of life on the maritime floor, and the emergence of new diseases are only the visible signs of this logic, which is leading to distress, desolation, and human misery.

This self-destructive logic is leading us to an uncertain world, where the development of ecosystem, ecological, technological and social irreversibility is very detrimental in the medium and long term for future human security. It should call upon States, territories, companies, and citizens of the world to recognize the urgent need to either change or to regress at the risk of perishing.

Is the Covid19 pandemic the ultimate alarm bell before it becomes too late for global safety of all the Human existence?

### Morocco's response to the social impact of COVID19 pandemic



***Driss Guerraoui and Bachir Tamer, The International Council of Social Welfare for the MENA Region***

As in the rest of the world, the crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the social conditions of entire populations in Morocco.

According to sources from the *Haut Commissaire au Plan*, an independent Moroccan statistics Agency, since the declaration of the state of health emergency on March 20, 2020, the rate of poverty has increased by 7 points from 1.7% to 11.7% during the lockdown, and the vulnerability rate has more than doubled, from 7.3% before the lockdown to 16.7% during the lockdown. By residential area, the vulnerability rate increased from 4.5% to 14.6% in urban areas and from 11.9% to 20.2% in rural areas.

Consequently, the pandemic generated a deterioration of the social, territorial, gender and sex inequalities, increasing the Gini index to 44.4%, compared to 38.5% prior to the crisis of covid19.

In addition, the public health situation, exacerbated by a drought year in agriculture, led to a serious degradation in the national labor market. The most striking features of this situation

are the loss of jobs, the drop in the volume of work per hour, and a further increase in the levels of unemployment, sub-employment and inactivity.

According to the same source, in the year 2020 the domestic economy suffered about 432,000 loss of jobs. The employment rate fell from 41.6% to 39.4%, the weekly number of hours of work was reduced by 20% from 494 million hours to 394 million hours, and the number of the unemployed increased to 1. 429,000 people, bringing the unemployment rate from 9.2% to 11.9%, nationwide, from 12.9% to 15.8% in the urban areas and from 3.7% to 5.9% in the rural areas.

In other respects, the active employed population in a situation of underemployment reached 1,127,000 people in 2020- against 1,001,000 in 2019, resulting in an increase in the rate of underemployment from 9.2% to 10.7%, on the national level, from 8.3% to 10.1% in urban areas and from 10.4% to 11.6% in rural areas.

Furthermore, the health emergency led to the shutdown of all educational institutions, which affected 8.9 million schoolchildren and youth. To ensure the continuous provision of public education services, the authorities have implemented a digital platform of online classes, involving the contribution of public television and radio channels.

Ultimately, all of this public effort of solidarity brought about an impact on the country's major macroeconomic and financial balances. In fact, according to Javier Diaz Casso, an expert at the World Bank, although the debt-to-GDP ratio has risen from 64.9% in 2019 to 77.8% in 2020 for a global average of 61.7%, the fiscal deficit has

risen from 3.6% of GDP to 7.7% during the same period.

Given this very difficult situation, and in the view of national and foreign credible and unbiased observers, the Morocco's response to the health crisis, conducted and supervised by King Mohammed VI, is outstanding in contrast to the strategies adopted by the MENA Governments as well as those at the international level. This strategy has three main components:

- An immediate response to limit the health crisis' impact on the most severely affected households, companies and regions.
- A short-term and medium-term public policy based on the generalization of Social Welfare to the whole population.
- And the initiation of the foundations of a long-term strategy aimed at achieving health independence.

### **1- An emergency handling of the social effects of the pandemic:**

These are measures supported through public aid to poor and vulnerable families in rural and urban areas, to workers in the informal and formal economy and to companies, which have been severely hit by this crisis, in particular SMEs and very small enterprises.

**The direct aid to households** targeted 5.5 million families, 45% of them rural, with a budget of 11 million dirhams. These allowances have been granted to households, regardless of whether or not they benefited from the medical care system provided for the poor and to households in the informal sector. The sums of the aid amounted to 800 DH for households of 2 persons, 1000 DH for

the households of 3 to 4 persons and 1200 DH for those of 4 persons and more. Likewise, the poor and vulnerable households have benefited from a postponement of the deadlines of real estate credit and consumer bank credits.

As for the assistance to enterprises, whose activity has declined or stopped, it included the grant of a monthly lump-sum allowance, which totaled 7 million dirhams, an alleviation of charges, support for cash flow, and facilitations for digitalized services.

In order to cover the costs of these initiatives, and following an initiative by King Mohammed VI, a special Covid-19 fund was created with 10 billion dirhams. This fund, which has reached the equivalent of 3% of the national GDP, has received a strong national solidarity response.

In another development, an Economic Watch Committee (CVE) has been instituted for the implementation of all these household and business support measures. Chaired by the Minister of the Economy, Finance and Administrative Reform, it includes representatives from the public and private sectors.

Alongside these measures, the national strategy also involved strengthening the country's health infrastructure. Hence, the number of intensive care beds has been increased to more than 3,000 from 1,642 previously. Likewise, several screening centers have been deployed and extended to university hospitals and health care facilities.

Furthermore, in order to further strengthen these infrastructures and to ensure health facilities throughout the whole national territory, King Mohammed VI, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, issued an order for the

deployment of military medical resources. This move has resulted in the construction of new military hospital structures, especially in marginal, fragile, outlying areas which are difficult to access for the population.

## **2- A short-term and medium-term public policy aimed at the generalization of social protection**

Human plights and the new kinds of fragility, poverty and vulnerability generated by the pandemic constituted a real shock to States, their citizens, their companies and their territories worldwide. In Morocco, this situation has accelerated the great national project to generalize the social welfare ecosystem.

Launched at the highest level of the State, the decision to generalize the system was announced by King Mohammed VI during his opening speech on October 9, 2020 at the 1st session of the Parliament.

The project consists of i) the extension by the end of 2022 of social health insurance to 22 million people to the benefit of the merchants, the craftsmen, the farmers, the liberal professions and the self-employed, ii) a generalization of family allowances to the benefit of 7 million children of school age, iii) an extension of the pension benefit to almost 5 million people, and iv) a generalization of the compensation for loss of employment for active employees.

This is a major national ambition, which represents a significant challenge which Morocco will have to meet, especially in terms of the governance process for generalization within the timeframe set at the end of 2022, and in terms of the financial sustainability of all social security schemes in their contributory and solidarity-based components.

### 3- A Long-term strategy for achieving health independence

Alongside these major structural social projects, Morocco has also set as a strategic objective the laying of the groundwork for the endogenous construction of a national ecosystem for the production of vaccines, medicines and medical devices, with a view to achieving health autonomy.

In this regard, on July 5, 2021, three agreements were signed under the chairmanship of the Head of State between representatives of the Moroccan State, the Chinese pharmaceutical group Sinopharm, the Swedish company Recipharm, the Moroccan company Sotherma and the consortium of Moroccan banks. These public private collaborations, which mobilize nearly 500 million dollars, are designed to enable the manufacturing in Morocco, by the end of December 2021, of about 5 million doses of vaccines against Covid-19.

It is worth noting that through this project, Morocco plans to establish its position in the medium and long term as a regional and international vaccine manufacturing platform for its population, as well as for the African continent and other regions of the world. This requires the development of a national ecosystem of research and innovation in biotechnology and drug logistics.

Meanwhile, Morocco has implemented a vaccination policy through Sinopharm and AstraZeneca that has allowed it to vaccinate more than 10 million people out of a total population of 36 million, with the objective of reaching a vaccination rate of around 80% by the end of December 2021. The figures indicate that as of July 2021, the country has recorded 534,797

confirmed cases and 9329 reported deaths. For comparison, a country in the MENA region, Tunisia, with a population of 11 million, recorded 443,631 confirmed cases and 15,377 reported deaths.

Despite the public efforts of solidarity and the pertinence of the national strategy to fight against the social impacts of the Covid pandemic<sup>19</sup>, we have to admit that many precarious, vulnerable and excluded categories of society have not benefited from the public assistance granted by this strategy. This concerns all the people who do not meet the criteria set by the public authorities. Among these categories are small craftsmen, young unemployed people without schooling, no training and no job, students, poor farmers with no land and no rights, women heads of households, single women and girls victim of violence, the elderly in a situation of poverty, the disabled with no resources, the abandoned homeless children, the migrants and the asylum seekers.

These facts indicate that our countries need to rethink the whole spectrum of public action in the area of social action and solidarity so as to be able to fight the future pandemics that our societies will face in an efficient and sustainable way.

This process must be based on fundamental shifts and breaks. These should be based on i) a radical change in our social development models based on two essential values: the dignity and value of Man, ii) the generalization of the Social Welfare Core, iii) the establishment of a basic income for all, iv) the conversion of the current inequalities into a productive inequality, v) a rethinking of the funding and the governance of the social solidarity, vi) and a genuine breakthrough in the current social dialogue model. (see ICSW Newsletter, 2021).

### Corona and Social Protection Policies: The Egyptian Experience



***Dr. Salah Hashem, President of the Strategic Forum for Public Policy and Development Studies -Egypt***

During the past period, humanity has faced a challenge that is harshly threatening its survival, nature and shape, to which humans have been accustomed since the dawn of life. Owing to that challenge, many statements related to the nature of human coexistence have been refuted, the first of which being Aristotle's "Man is social by nature" statement. According to which, it had been deemed peculiar for a person to live isolated or socially excluded. The pandemic came to break all these taken for granted concepts, making it necessary for a person to contradict his or her nature of being social, since isolation and social exclusion under dominance of the virus have become a prerequisite for the continuation of their own life. Likewise, the epidemic has shattered the brains of globalization, as it killed the well-bred thought of turning the world into a single global village and dropped the fundamental idea that cultural friction and social mixing were a condition for catching up with the renaissance convoy.

Today, in order to preserve humanity, it has become unavoidable for societies to isolate themselves from other societies and, worse, from

one another, since they would have to give up the simplest prerequisite for their existence and refrain from sociability, simply though ironically meaning they cannot be called "societies" anymore. The pandemic has extended borders, deepened gaps, and raised walls among nations and among people, shutting everything down and shutting our mouths up. It seems that Corona is a message from God to Earth, in order to direct the people to renovate the falling structure of the human action system, which had deteriorated and been corrupted through years of value loss, and perhaps now is the only time left for reconstruction.

Not only have all signs of closeness and affinity born in the human customs and traditions and associated with social interaction and communication such as greetings, salutes, handshakes, hugs, high-fives, etc., been shunned and frowned upon, but also business, trade, projects, plans, travel, transportation, trade, importation and exportation, etc., have all been suspended, halted, or at least cut short. In other words, the potential and reality of the millennium objectives, ambitions, and inspirations have been questioned by Covid-19, which caused a damning exposé of all the defects within most, if not all, of the international regimes. It has been proven to the public that the manifestations of development and progress many countries brag about are "All crown, no filling".

In this context, a recent United Nations report points out the effects of this epidemic on the 17 sustainable development goals, explaining how this catastrophe may prompt the organization to rearrange its goals and priorities following the pandemic, for which there is no reliable indicator to predict a forthcoming end, or a total estimate of its expected material and human losses. The report concluded that the epidemic has hampered

food production and supplies distribution, and brought about inability of large human groups to access clean water, depriving them even from washing their hands properly. According to the statistics of the World Health Organization, there are 3 billion people globally who may not have access to basic hand washing facilities in their homes. Perhaps this is what made these groups more vulnerable to the epidemic. In this regard, the report also indicated that slum dwellers are more susceptible to infection with the virus due to the fact that slums are the most overcrowded areas and have an abysmal lack of hygiene and disinfection material. Additionally, this epidemic has caused the health systems in most countries to be unable to receive and seat for all those infected with the virus, not to mention its disastrous impact on the medical staff themselves.

With regard to education, the report indicated that nearly 1.25 billion learners, equal to 72.9% of the total registered learners around the world, were affected by the outbreak of the corona virus until last March, forcing the closure of too many schools, and urging lots of governments to resort to distance education, which was deemed by several experts insufficient and unattainable for most students. According to the report, the epidemic has caused a violation of the principle of gender equality, depriving women of a large part of their income, in addition to increasing the rate of violence directed at them. Since women represent the largest segment of health and social care workers, they are again more vulnerable to infection.

As for work environments and economic growth, the International Labor Organization has forecast that nearly 25 million people will lose their jobs due to the economic and labor crisis caused by the pandemic. The organization warned that

people who have temporary jobs may not receive the social protection they need in times of crisis. The organization has called on governments to guarantee at least a basic level of social security for their citizens, and to progressively ensure adequate levels of protection for as many people as possible, and as soon as possible. Another big deal the U.N report points to is the economic losses countries are likely to incur as a result of the spread of this epidemic, since its spread led to the disruption or cessation of many economic activities, in addition to a reduction in working time and workers number, eventually leading to a decline in the level of income and an increase in the unemployment rate. The fact that numerous families and communities fall below the poverty line make them the most vulnerable groups who usually pay a heavy price in crises.

Perhaps the only positive side in that situation is that the spread of this epidemic, as indicated by the report, prompted the U.N to issue an urgent global call for a cease-fire worldwide. The United Nations also called for a unified international effort to combat the disaster, stressing that the anger of the virus illustrated the folly of war, and that it was high time for the armed conflict to halt, and for regimes to focus on the real battle for the sake of peoples' lives. The people most likely to suffer the devastating losses of the virus are residents of conflict-ridden societies.

Despite the growing opposition against globalization driven by the outbreak of the virus, and the government's disregard to climate improvement activities and programs, with international cooperation efforts merely devoted for public health, the decline in production rates and the decrease in transportation and commute have accidentally effected a decline in the environmental pollution rates. In conclusion, the report makes it clear that most of the efforts

made by world governments to confront Corona are defensive efforts that may not achieve the desired results. Not only through defense do we win the battle, but primarily through offense can we defeat this malicious enemy. Hence, we do need to engage the viral enemy with aggressive clear-target tactics.

### **Corona and the Crisis of the State Social Role:**

Although the repercussions of the emerging covid-19 are not over yet, researchers and those concerned with development in most countries of the world have gone beyond addressing these consequences, and proceeded to discuss the future of development following the not yet determined end of that pandemic. Talking about the future of development in view of such constantly increasing rates of infection is pure absurdity!

Since the pandemic have typically halted all strategic plans of the majority of institutions, societies, and even individuals alike, the only rationale plan under the unstoppable spread of this pandemic, which coincides with an unprecedented rise in the rate of infection and death, would be the plan to prevent infection with the virus. Consequently, it is not acceptable to close the eyes to these repercussions or stop addressing and dealing with them. The pandemic has had so many victims, mostly women, the elderly, as well as the nongovernmental and nonofficial laboring classes.

Since the pandemic has exposed the shortfalls in health systems in several countries in the world with no distinction between rich or poor countries, we must agree that the health and social insurance services provide coverage only for the working classes and only until retirement age, overlooking the unemployed groups and

those over the work age, of which women naturally constitute a large part. Only workers in the official economic sector can benefit from these services, with no covering for the marginal or non-official economic sector.

Although the virus does not discriminate between people on the basis of their wealth, the level of income has to do with the available coping mechanisms, as the low-income workers do not have the ability to do their work remotely and do not get paid if they are absent from work. With home confinement continuing and economies entering recession, the poorest segments of society, who make up the majority of citizens, will be unjustly affected. Temporary workers will find it impossible to deal with the repercussions of this situation. However, we do not seem to have a solid plan on how to minimize the economic and social damage caused by this pandemic. This is not the case in Egypt solely. I believe the absence of an effective plan for equitable health care and protection has undoubtedly become a global issue.

In this context, we cannot deny that there are many challenges facing temporary employment in all its forms, whether seasonal, day-to-day or wage-earning. Those suffering from difficult living conditions, exorbitant cost of accessing health services, dependence on aid or daily wages, a shortage of legal protection, national loaning or insurance coverage, and deprivation of education; are on top of that facing, along with the entire world, the challenge of the emerging global epidemic. Given that these fragile groups of workers are among the groups mostly affected by the absence of a just health system, health care has become not only an ethical but also a political requirement, as the first priority and the only guarantee of stability in social, economic and political components.

This pandemic highlighted the significance of investing in health infrastructure and systems so as to develop positive response to emerging needs, and to deal with globalized epidemics, restoring the social role of the state represented in protecting health security, as well as the pivotal role of the public health sector, especially due to its comprehensiveness and the limited financial obstacles to obtaining its services when compared to the private sector.

Considering the multiplicity and complexity of the impacts of this cursed virus, thinking should not be confined to the defensive position, but we ought to think seriously about how to turn this epidemic into an added opportunity for development, and a conducive atmosphere for integrity and solidarity among all sectors of the state which have no alternative to supporting and investing in health development, in a way that serves the achievement of universal coverage objectives with equitable health systems, "seeking the noble goal of health for all".

Therefore, we should now agree that profitable health institutions, no matter how large and various they are, do not constitute fair health systems, and will forever remain competing corporations, whose number one commodity is human health. Consequently, we cannot combat this epidemic, except by eliminating the phenomenon of "commodification of human health". This requires a real change in the mentality of those in charge of formulating health care policies, but then again that will not be possible except by setting an overall policy that exalts the value of health, and categorically rejects the commodification of human health.

### **Corona and Traditional Forms of Social Protection:**

Corona has drawn up a test for the traditional forms of social protection. Today, global social policies are at a crossroads, as traditional aid programs have failed to protect the most vulnerable and the poorest from economic risks. This prompted the major economic and development institutions in the world to talk about a "Universal Basic Income," which aims to provide a stable income for all citizens without exception, so that they can meet their basic needs, in an attempt to reduce inequality among people, while giving priority in protection to the groups most at risk, such as unofficial workers, the elderly and the unemployed. The Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a fixed amount provided by the state to all its citizens, without exception, regardless of income or work position. In this regard, there are several proposals for implementation. While some see that the state should disburse these sums on a weekly or monthly basis, there are those who consider giving the citizen the full amount as soon as they reach the age of 18.

The amount varies from one country to another, but the constant is that the amount is as much as the average basic needs of the individual in a particular country. This system has been referred to by several terms, including the unconditional basic income, the citizen's income, and the basic insurance system. Although this system may seem somewhat socialist, it is strange though that most of the capitalist class supports it! While some see the need to implement the system in order to redistribute wealth and restore the lost balance, and that it is a good ground for achieving economic security, which gives people an opportunity to continue education, training, and planning for the future; there are those who believe that paying people money without working leads them to lose the motive to have a job.

Regarding the Egyptian situation, the International Monetary Fund has made a calculation for the application of the universal basic income in Egypt, in which it presented three scenarios to reduce poverty, the fixed or universal basic income being the bottom line. Although the financial amount decided for the proposed basic income in the three scenarios is weak and the cost of granting it to citizens is not great, it still contributes significantly to reducing poverty rates, bearing in mind that the application of such universal basic income scheme is not a substitute for other social protection programs, but rather a complement to them.

In the first scenario, the state grants all citizens a lump sum of 725 Egyptian pounds annually. The cost of this scenario does not exceed 3.5% of gross domestic product (GDP). Despite the small amount, it contributes to reducing the poverty rate by 4.1%, and also contributes to reducing inequality by 6 points based on the Gini coefficient. While in the second scenario the same amount is directed to groups of children under the age of 17. Usually, this option contributes to reducing the poverty rate by 5.6%, and its cost does not exceed 1.3% of GDP. In the third scenario, support or basic income is directed to children and the elderly over 65. The cost of this scenario is 1.5% of GDP. This option contributes to reducing the poverty rate by 6.1%. Apparently, Universal basic income can be applied gradually between different population groups, as well as between different geographical areas.

Perhaps all of these scenarios push our minds to think outside the box and reconsider the traditional social protection programs that rely on cash support either conditional or unconditional, emphasizing that these programs

do not actually reduce poverty; but rather, their role is limited to maintaining the survival of the poor, and also emphasizing that continuing to provide cash support for a period exceeding three years is a negative indicator, which confirms the inadequacy of the social protection programs to rid the poor of poverty. The real confrontation with poverty lies in establishing a culture of work and production and facilitating all means toward that aim, which can happen through replacing cash support programs with ones that provide the means and tools of production for the poor.

The Egyptian model of contemporary reform and development has been able to transcend the traditional antireform predicaments, the most important of which being the inability of multiple human categories and production patterns to keep pace with the reform policies. This leads to high rates of marginalization, poverty and vulnerability, which often prompted countries to gradually retreat from the idea of complete reform for fear of massive popular uprisings that might undermine all the returns of reform. However, the uniqueness of the Egyptian reform program lies in its integration into a comprehensive sustainable development plan, for the duration of over 15 years, from 2015 to 2030.

Before Egypt began the first steps of reform, represented in floating the pound or liberalizing the exchange rate in November 2016, the Egyptian government had adopted an ambitious national program for social protection in 2015. The government entrusted its implementation to the Ministry of Social Solidarity with the aim of providing cash support to desperate families. The cash support program (Solidarity and Dignity) was then transformed into a conditional cash support program. There is no support for the illiterate, no support for dropping out of school, no support

for lack of health care, and subsequently no support for early-marriage girls, the latest condition for obtaining cash support from the Ministry of Solidarity set by Mrs. Nevin Al-Kabbaj in the first half of 2021. The number of beneficiaries of this program to date has reached 3.8 million families, totaling 15 million beneficiaries out of 29.7 million poor people in Egypt, according to the latest report of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics.

Around 2017, with a loan of \$12 billion from the International Monetary Fund, the Egyptian government started to implement the economic reform program, during which the poverty rate witnessed a remarkable increase from 27.8% in 2015 to 32.4% in 2018. The Ministry of Social Solidarity announced that the monetary support policies along with the concept of complete dependence on the state must be changed, and then the policies of the Solidarity and Dignity program were altered to encourage production. At this time, the Ministry of Social Solidarity launched the "Chance" program, which guarantees the provision of an appropriate job opportunity for those who are able to benefit from the Solidarity and Dignity program as an alternative to cash support. Accordingly, the entire policies of the Egyptian government have shifted from a welfare state to a developmental state, in a way that subsequently reduced the poverty rate to 29.7% in 2020.

That was on the level of social reforms that preceded and coincided with the implementation of the economic reform program, but the state tended to invest in everything, even in the desert. For instance, housing policies turned to invest in desert areas to solve the housing crisis in Egypt by building more than 20 residential communities and more

than 14 administrative capitals, and 22 other public buildings are being established in the Egyptian governorates. Hence, the price per square meter in the desert increased from 150 pounds at most to 14 thousand pounds at least. With such policies, the overpopulated areas in Egypt were relatively depopulated and, in return, the number of inhabited areas increased, while preserving human and cultural diversity through the establishment of tourist, rural, industrial and Bedouin communities.

Egypt has abandoned its mild role confined to providing limited care to its poor children, and powerfully turned to the developmental state that opens broader horizons before its citizens, ridding them of the vicious circle of poverty and making them active producers in their societies as opposed to the charity receivers they used to be. As a result, only those who were truly unable to work and deserve support receive assistance from the state institutions, and the support they receive is not a favor or charity anymore, but rather a right.

As the state forcefully entered the production and industry market through its interest in and concentration on giant and mega national projects along with other various fields, mainly relying on intensive-labor production patterns, and bridging the deficit in domestic consumption, encouraging exports and reducing import rates, the Egyptian state confirmed it was leaping at an unprecedented speed toward turning into a Smart Republic and thus witnessed a digital transformation in most sectors (smart cities, smart villages, smart schools and universities, etc.), a transformation in which the state does not abandon its caring role, but actually counts on investment in projects, services, and the people themselves.

**How did the Egyptian government face the repercussions of Covid-19?**

The Egyptian society, like the rest of the societies in the world, has been affected by the Corona pandemic, socially, economically and healthily. The only difference was the Egyptian reform experience, which had already begun almost three years before the pandemic, and was still ongoing. Whereas the economic reform program that Egypt had started as of 2015 began to bear fruits, it additionally assisted in bearing the economic and social consequences of the Covid-19 crisis, and gradually restored economic stability.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the Egyptian government has allocated an amount of 100 million pounds to mitigate the effects of the Corona crisis. Most of that allocation was concentrated on supporting the tourism, industry and agricultural sectors, reducing the interest rate and allowing for longer grace periods to repay loans. In addition to the government attention to developing more comprehensive and long-term social policies, such as expanding insurance coverage for irregular employment, a strategy was set to protect and support temporary employees through an emergency support fund designated for this purpose. Egypt has also recorded remarkable progress in terms of study continuation in schools and universities during both the first and the second waves of the pandemic thanks to the progress in digital transformation and distance education.

The general framework set by the Egyptian government to deal with the Corona virus crisis included targeting temporary flexible mechanisms and measures capable of coping with the potential situation developments and updates at

the economical and social levels throughout the phases of the crisis on the short and medium terms. In addition, the Egyptian government adopted the concept of selection, by assigning the lion share of protection and support to the most vulnerable groups and the most affected economic sectors, as well as working to enhance the principle of transparency and disclosure in facing the crisis through continuous communication with the public, as well as announcing clearly the size and development of support programs for the various concerned institutions, and publicizing what the government has done with regard to taking proactive measures to meet health and social needs, and also supporting the sectors directly affected by the crisis, noting that there are still risks to the economic outlook, especially due to the second wave of the epidemic which has raised uncertainty about the pace of domestic and global recovery.

Perhaps these measures have made Egypt one of the least affected developing countries either socially or economically by the Covid-19. Egypt managed to maintain its economic growth rates and was able to rank second in economic growth after China in 2020, according to the International Monetary Fund report, which indicated that the Egyptian economy has become capable of withstanding all types of adversities.

**Conclusion:**

It hurts to see the world that had reached the moon flipping and falling back down rapidly. It also hurts to see that all gates have been shut before you; however, the gates of heaven are still open. Perhaps our minds lured us when we started exploring the universe and believed we would leave the earth to find an alternative home on Mars or another planet, and maybe the earth became fed up with our corruption and amassed

environmental disasters and finally decided to throw us away and bring to life a new creation that treats it with respect. Whatever the justifications, and whether we admit that it is a furious natural disaster or a biological third world war, we have to confess that the pain is the same in all cases. We are all losers here, no one is a winner.

The emerging corona virus crisis has shown that the neoliberal policies pursued for decades with its imposed unfairness against the disadvantaged and the abandoned restrictions in favor of the privileged as well as the privatization of vital public sectors is no longer able to protect us from this damning epidemic. Since those deprived of free health care and social protection are apparently the first and foremost victims of this pandemic, the poor, the irregular workers, the homeless and the marginalized are therefore the most underprivileged. Based on what the recent years have witnessed, there has been a growing awareness as to the need for strong, comprehensive and universal social protection, as reported by Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and the Social Protection Floors of the International Labor Organization. Although these initiatives are still shy and timidly developing, they nonetheless reflect an increased awareness and provide effective systems of social services, protecting and immunizing human beings against the vagaries of nature in all parts of the world. Therefore, it is time to take all necessary measures so that the relevant recommendations of the international community can be immediately implemented.

In recognition of the work of the World Social Forum for Health and Social Security together with its keenness to provide everything necessary to support the initiatives, and realizing the importance of all of us working toward

adopting alternative public policies which prioritize people and environment, all developmental staff including those well-versed in social policies should cling to the demand for the adoption of alternative social policies to the brutal neoliberal policies. Based on the aforementioned besides my own convictions that we are fighting in a war we are not a party thereto, and that we are merely reaping its devastating harvest, most of the developing countries, including Egypt, are debtor countries or borrowers from giant international economic institutions and countries. In the midst of these circumstances, these countries may not be able to fulfill their debt obligations or interests. We therefore stress the need for the international system to provide a comprehensive health system that offers free health care to all, without exception, regardless of any cause for discrimination, either based on nationality or social class. We also advocate the necessity of linking, in light of these alternative policies, between guaranteeing the right to health care and the provision of all other social protection conditions. In that regard, we are bound to consider all the rights under the umbrella of social protection, such as the right to clean water, free education, proper food, decent housing, respectable job, fair income, and a healthy environment.

Accordingly, we demand the establishment of a world charter for the universal social protection, realizing that social protection is an inherent human right, based on the system of rights and freedoms as well as the broad global solidarity imposed as a result of the advocacy of such system. Hence, it is imperative for governments of the world to expedite the cancellation of debts burdened by poor countries, stop fighting, lift all forms of blockades or sanctions, and peacefully

resolve conflicts in a manner that reflects positively on social protection.

Moreover; Governments should also expedite the adoption of the principle of nuclear, chemical and biological disarmament, trying to put an end to armed conflicts, encouraging and enhancing productive work, fundamental research, search for new medicines and vaccines, preservation of biodiversity, space conquest, and setting up human-rights-friendly budgets. These demands will not be achievable without these governments seeking to endorse the principle of social solidarity between the peoples in their constitutions, and the principle of public social utilities protection, especially in terms of health, education, water, electricity, fuels, and Internet services, etc.

This article is an urgent appeal to the international regimes to come together to confront the economic and social aftermath of the Corona virus. My dream is that my voice will reach out to the world governments, administrations, and institutions, sounding an alarm to those rational officials in order for them to issue their last call to save us all from the scourge of this insidious biological warfare.

### Impacts of covid19 on persons with disabilities in Lebanon



***Moussa Chrafeddine,  
President of I'DAD-Friends of the Disabled Association***

Persons with disabilities in Lebanon represent between 10 and 15% of the total population of 7 million, totaling approximately to around 910,000 (K4D[1]report).

As in many parts of the world, people with disabilities in Lebanon are among the most excluded and marginalized population groups. They contend with a systemic lack of provisions for rights, resources, and services and experience widespread marginalization, exclusion and violence at home and outside. This applies to all areas of their lives including access to quality care facilities.

With the Lebanese economy practically in freefall, poverty and unemployment rates have reached records high, with disproportionately adverse impacts on persons with disabilities, among other most vulnerable groups.

The unabating COVID-19 outbreak currently afflicting Lebanon and the measures that were necessary to contain it have resulted in increasing economic hardship including on the affordability and accessibility to healthcare services.

The horrific explosion that rocked the Beirut Port on 4 August 2020, has caused huge physical damages and shattered the lives and livelihood of people, not only in the immediate vicinity of the blast but across Beirut. The adverse, economic and social impacts of the explosion will be felt throughout Lebanon.

Currently, there is limited information on the impact of the blast on persons with disabilities. Many persons with injuries are at risk of developing disabilities if not properly diagnosed and supported. Large number of persons with injuries overwhelmed the hospitals and primary health care centers, many of which were already strained and are now damaged by the explosion.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires that disaster preparedness and response initiatives are inclusive of, and accessible to, persons with disabilities. A barrier-free environment helps to ensure full and equal participation in society by all, regardless of age, gender or ability, with dignity and with as much independence as possible. Universally designed shelters benefit not only persons with disabilities but other people with reduced mobility, such as elderly people, pregnant women, young children or people who are temporarily impaired. Consequently, they benefit whole families and communities. Pro

The inclusion of universal design and accessibility principles into the reconstruction and renovations efforts after the explosion contributes towards a barrier-free environment and

an inclusive society: "A society accessible for persons with disabilities is one accessible to all".

### Appreciating the urgency

Price increases linked to the economic crisis, the devaluation of the currency and the economic fallout from COVID-19 lockdown measures, are hindering the provision of required support to persons with disabilities, depriving large numbers of them (Lebanese and refugees) from essential live-saving equipment and assistive devices that they need.

Failure to provide such essential equipment expose PWDs to serious health problems and complications, such as the development of life-threatening infections, which would require intensive and expensive medical care that would add to the existing burden on PwDs and the government.

Originally conceived weeks before the explosion, this initiative was intended to cover the deficit in the Ministry of Social Affairs' budget (LBP 6 billion, annually), allocated under the Rights and Access Programme<sup>1</sup> to provide the essential assistive and life support devices (technical mobility and incontinence equipment) to persons with disabilities. Now with additional burden generated by the explosion, implementation of this initiative has become more urgent.

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<sup>1</sup> The Rights and Access Programme is implemented in all eight governorates of Lebanon and has accredited 5 NGOs in 8 centers

to deliver technical aids (wheelchairs, seat corsets, etc.), incontinence aids (layers, probes, etc.) and aids for the prevention of bedsores (mattresses, cushions etc

**More Activity at ICSW  
- Save the Date!**

**ICSW Online Conference**

**“Addressing food insecurity in Africa: strategies for ensuring child-sensitive social protection”**

**Thursday, 9 September, 2021  
8:00am ~ 11:30am (EST, NY time)**

ICSW in cooperation with IASSW, UNICEF, FAO, KNCSW and UNED

Food and nutrition security is one of the key issues among the development priorities of many African countries. The existing food insecurity in Africa is a huge and complex challenge that is closely linked to the risk of malnutrition, health care, education, political stability, poverty as well as overall national development priorities and directions. Gaining a better understanding of the multidimensional nature of the challenge of food insecurity especially its complex impact on children can facilitate concerted actions and better targeting of interventions by national governments, international bodies and civil society organizations.

Addressing a range of specific issues in the context of food security and child-sensitive social protection in Africa, the conference will provide perspective on areas of particular importance, including the role of key stakeholders and their interaction. There are roughly two major sets of issues to address. First, conceptual and general issues pertinent to food insecurity in Africa,

analysis of vulnerabilities, measures aimed at promoting inclusive growth, efforts aimed at strengthening cooperation with various stakeholders and strategies to improve capacity development. Second, national case studies that may illustrate changing approaches to the above issues, various dimensions of the existing situation and national best practices.

The projected outcome could bring an improved understanding of the whole spectrum of policy issues and trade-offs in the context of food security and child –sensitive social protection in Africa and could be used by ICSW and partners in their advocacy and policy advice.

More information:

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**Contributions to the newsletter are welcome!**