

**FORUM OF MINISTERS  
IN CHARGE OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FROM SOUTH ASIA  
20-22 FEBRUARY 2011  
COLOMBO, SRI LANKA**

**COLOMBO DECLARATION**

1. Upon the invitation of H.E. Mr. Felix Perera, Minister of Social Services, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, the Forum of Ministers in charge of Social Development from South Asia met on 20, 21 and 22 February 2011 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to attend the Third Ministerial Meeting on Social Protection Policies in South Asia. Ministers and High Level Officials of the following countries attended this meeting, co-organized by UNESCO with the Ministry of Social Services, Government of Sri Lanka: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.
2. In addition, the meeting was attended by the Assistant Director-General, Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO and representatives from UN agencies, NGOs and researchers.
3. Approving the initiative for organizing this Forum, the Ministers present commit to support and adopt the following Declaration:

We, the Ministers in charge of Social Development from South Asia, meeting in Colombo on 20, 21 and 22 February, 2011:

- Driven by the urgency to counteract the devastating impact of the global financial and economic crisis, including the food crisis, especially on the poor population of our countries;
- Convinced that social protection measures and schemes, taken within a holistic developmental perspective, are an investment in overall social and economic development, contributing to poverty reduction, reduction of inequalities, social inclusion and cohesion as well as economic growth;
- Noting that the countries in the region have the largest concentration of people in poverty and share not only similar historical and cultural linkages, going back thousands of years, but also similar challenges in social development in the present;
- Acknowledging the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disability, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, the Internationally Agreed Development Goals, the UNESCO Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations, the SAARC Social Charter, the SAARC Development Goals, and the UN Social Protection Floor Initiative<sup>1</sup>;

- Recalling the findings of the UNESCO World Social Science Report 2010, revealing the marginal presence of South Asia in the domain of international social science research and its limited impact on policy making;
- Recognizing the importance of promoting human dignity, harmony, human rights, inclusion, equality of opportunity and decent work, and having celebrated on 20 February 2011 the World Day of Social Justice;
- Affirming our political will and determination to promote and expand the scope of social protection policies;

#### **AGREE TO:**

- Pledge to increase public funding to build the capacities of the social sciences in the region, through evidence based research, analysis and statistics<sup>2</sup>;
- Ensure that national higher education and research systems, science policies, and national regulatory bodies pay equal attention to the state of social science research and give corresponding support;
- Commit to adopt a comprehensive approach to social protection, encompassing preventive, protective and promotional measures that address both individual and community risks and deprivations, while not disregarding traditional systems of social assistance;
- Recognize the need for expanding the scope and benefits of social protection to the most neglected and vulnerable sections of society such as, informal workers, migrants, persons with disabilities, the urban poor, and other marginalized groups facing discrimination and exclusion;
- Emphasize child-sensitive social protection initiatives as an effective strategy to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and reduce socio-economic disparities;

---

<sup>1</sup>The UN Social Protection Floor Initiative, launched in 2009, is a UN system wide effort that through increased interagency collaboration promotes universal access to essential social transfers (cash and kind transfers providing minimum income and livelihood security) and services (water and sanitation, food and adequate nutrition, health, education, housing, life and asset saving information and other social services).

<sup>2</sup> Drawing from recommendations of researchers at the UNESCO-ICSSR Research Meeting on Social Protection Policies in South Asia on 18-19 March, 2010 in New Delhi, India.

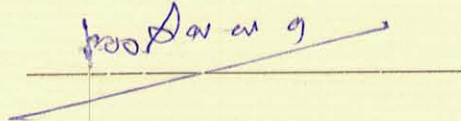
- Recognize that youth are partners for development and give due attention to building their capacities through vocational training and development of skills;
- Encourage promotion of employment-led development strategies to ensure people's livelihoods and facilitate inclusive and redistributive growth;
- Combine efforts to identify existing gaps in design modalities, coverage and implementation quality of social protection programmes;
- Build institutional and governance capacities and preparedness in delivery of social protection programmes, and ensure their regular monitoring and evaluation;
- Prioritize financing for social protection measures in national expenditure plans;
- Strive to move towards a universalized, rights-based, gender sensitive approach in the extension of social protection, providing dignity and voice to the poor and vulnerable and fostering equity, inclusion and citizenship;
- Advance the agenda for a social protection floor, ensuring universal access to essential social transfers and services, adapted to specific country contexts;
- Strengthen regional cooperation among our countries in enriching the field of social protection research and outreach through:
  - Advancing knowledge and research on neglected themes and excluded groups in the field of social protection
  - Pooling and exchanging information on research outcomes
  - Feeding research outcomes to policy makers to improve policy formulation
  - Encouraging think tanks and networks on social protection in the region
  - Conducting training and capacity building for policy makers and Government officials responsible for implementation, for learning and sharing on social protection programmes and on rights-based approaches to programming
  - Exchanging best practices on social protection policies and undertaking cross country studies, exposure visits and joint projects
  - Calling upon UN organizations and international donors to support South Asian countries in their efforts towards expanding public awareness, outreach and scope of social protection initiatives

We commend the Government of Sri Lanka for having hosted the Third Forum of Ministers on Social Protection Policies in South Asia, and for the support of the Government of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Social Services and UNESCO in organizing it.

**FORUM OF MINISTERS  
IN CHARGE OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FROM SOUTH ASIA  
20-22 FEBRUARY 2011  
COLOMBO, SRI LANKA**

**COLOMBO DECLARATION**

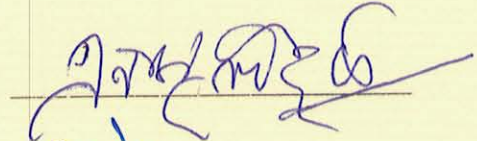
1. Hon. Mr Felix Perera  
(Sri Lanka)



2. Hon. Ms Amena S. Afzali  
(Afghanistan)



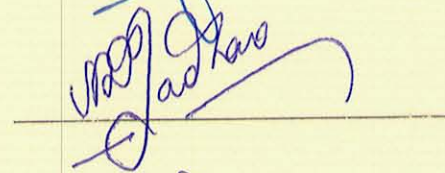
3. Hon. Mr. Enamul Hoque Mostafa Shahid  
(Bangladesh)



4. Mr. Tshewang Tandin  
(Bhutan)



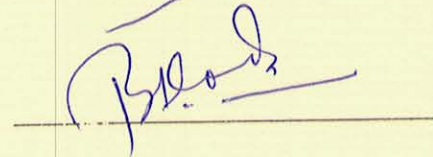
5. Dr. Narendra Jadhav  
(India)



6. Ms. Mariya Ali  
(Maldives)



7. Ms. Bindra Hada  
(Nepal)



Colombo, 22 February 2011