

International Council on Social Welfare
Black Sea Regional Civil Society Forum

RESOLUTION

17 January 2004

Yerevan, Republic of Armenia

We, the representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of the Member States of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Ukraine), convened a civil society forum on 15-17 January 2004 in Yerevan, Republic of Armenia with the assistance of the International Council on Social Welfare. We exchanged experience and visions of the role of NGOs in the solution of social problems in the countries of the region and declared the following:

1. Acknowledging the role of NGOs in:

- Monitoring of state responsibility in the implementation of social policy and the provision of social programs;
- Provision of social services to the population;
- Elaborating standards for social protection of specific social groups;
- Lobbying for the interests of targeted social groups as well as NGOs to the government structures;
- Raising the public feeling for law and order and public awareness of social problems and of the means for their solution;
- Initiating and promoting dialogue between government and the general population in order to enhance the development of targeted and effective social programs;
- Ensuring citizen participation in the decision making processes on all levels;
- Promotion of civic minded society and social partnerships;
- Formation and transmission of a new democratic culture;
- Upholding values of mutual support and philanthropy.

We state our firm commitment to combine NGO efforts to combat poverty and ensure sustainable development in the countries of the region.

2. We declare our willingness to actively cooperate with governments, intergovernmental structures, international organizations, and all stakeholder institutions with the purpose of reducing poverty and ensuring sustainable development in the region.

3. We recognize that despite different characteristics of economic development in the countries of the region certain negative social effects are typical throughout namely:

- **Unemployment** – as a result of general trends in economic and technological reformations unemployment is becoming more acute as not only an economic issue but as a social and political concern as well;
- **Declining Public Health** – declines are exposed by the deterioration of demographic indicators (increase of morbidity rates and decline in birth rates), by the spread of diseases and the threat of pandemics, mostly among vulnerable groups in society, and by inaccessibility to adequate health care services;
- **Labor Driven Mass Migration** – difficulties brought about by transition, long term unemployment and other factors have resulted in mass outflows of the

population to seek jobs abroad, while the hosting countries often lack adequate mechanisms for legal and social protection of migrant workers;

- **Violation of Human Rights and Women's Rights in particular** - limited access of citizens, especially women, to decision making processes, lack of legal protection institutions, gender and age inequity, feminization of poverty and trafficking are serious impediments to the promotion of democracy in the region;
- **Deterioration of the Environment** – The difficulties of the transition period have brought about excessive utilization of natural resources, creating a real threat to the maintenance of ecological balance in the region, which is deepened by the absence of developed ecological culture among the citizens of our countries.

Under the light of the problems described above, certain vulnerable groups require enhanced social protection throughout the region:

- **The Elderly** – the increasing urgency of the needs of elderly persons in the region is explained by a general trend in population aging and inefficient measures of social protection for this group owing to limited resources of national governments;
- **Refugees and Internally Displaced People** – This segment of population suffers from sustained poverty, inadequate dwellings, limited access to social and healthcare services, restricted opportunities for self-help and income generation, and absence of overall integration into society;
- **Disabled Persons** – This population is considered to be one of the most vulnerable not only in terms of incapability of the existing social security systems to respond to their specific needs but also in terms of restrictions and lack of opportunities and mechanisms for their integration into the mainstream of society;
- **Children and Youth** - transition processes resulted in the weakening of state functions in providing contemporary and adequate knowledge and skills to children and youth as well as weakening the basis of vocational orientation and the propagation of the social and cultural legacies of countries in the region;

4. We acknowledge the efforts made by governments towards the solution of social issues and poverty reduction overall. However, they have been insufficient to ensure social progress in the Member States of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation due to slow economic growth, prevalence of corruption, inequitable distribution of resources, and limited state budget allocations in the social sphere. All this has resulted in the weakening of social protection systems and diminishing the efficiency of social policy measures.

5. We understand that within democratic societies the effectiveness and efficiency of measures to address social issues are formed by the interaction and partnership of various independent actors, including NGOs.

6. We believe in the expediency of activating the activities of NGOs in the region to support the elaboration and execution of social policy initiatives on the basis of partnership. To this end, we decided to:

- Establish a Regional Cooperation Network of Non - Governmental Organizations of the Member States of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (hereafter referred to as - the Network).
- Establish a Lobbying Group of 5 persons representing NGOs that are members of the Network, in order to draw attention to social concerns and initiatives in participating countries as well as on the international level. The Lobbying Group

will serve to facilitate and stimulate cooperation between the Network and intergovernmental and international structures, specifically the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC).

- Delegate the Armenian based NGO “Mission Armenia” to host the Network Secretariat to carry out all its relevant functions and register the Network in Armenia.

Having agreed on the creation of the Network and having jointly developed the outline of its General Provisions (see attached to this document), we agree on the following:

- NGOs participating in the Forum are the founding members of the Network
- The management and representation of the Network will be carried out by a Coordination Council (hereafter referred to as – the Council)
- The Council is formed by representatives of national Focal NGOs from each participant country of the Network.

7. We call for all the parties responsible for the elaboration and execution of social policies in the countries of the region to recognize and prioritize the development of programs and initiatives to address the negative social indicators and special needs of vulnerable groups that we have highlighted. On our part, we take responsibility and adopt this resolution as guidelines for initiating activities to support the solution of social issues and the development of cooperation between member NGOs of the Network and all stakeholders.

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