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## Statement submitted by Third World Institute - Instituto del Tercer Mundo (ITeM), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council* and the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF)

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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## Statement

The Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) unites more than 140 CSOs and Trade Unions globally in their motivation to realize universal social protection.

**Now, in 2027,** we must keep focused more than ever on achieving universal social protection. The global South, especially Africa, faces persistently low levels of coverage that demand action to raise the enforceability of commitments, to raise funding and to raise coverage. Scarcely over half (52 per cent) of the global population is now covered by at least a single form of social protection, and nearly half (48 per cent) of the global population, disproportionately comprising informal and rural workers, and at least 2 billion children, has no protection whatsoever.

**We know our obligations** - in Human Rights, to the 2030 agenda and the forceful commitments made in 2026 at Doha - to embed social protection in national laws and budgets, and pursue policies and actions to guarantee universal social protection across the life course.

**We know that universal social protection demonstrates the core solidarity of the social contract**.

**We know social protection works** – by enabling individuals to control their lives; fostering cohesion in family, community and nation; supporting productivity - and hence employment, investment and economic development.

**Social protection provides stability** in downturns and crises; it proved itself during the Covid19 epidemic.

**Yet, our political will is faltering, even failing**.

**Universal social protection must not be seen merely in terms of the bill to be paid.** It is first and foremost an investment in human dignity, a profound reflection of our values, our humanity and common cause, enshrined in Human Rights and promoted by the multilateral agenda. Without universal social protection, we cannot attain the sustainable and population-wide prosperity and political stability to which we aspire.

**Yet the movement toward universal social protection is slowing;** due to withdrawal of support for social development from the North to the South and the shifting priorities of geopolitical forces; the increasing burden of debt in the South; and austerity that constrains fiscal space and restrains social spending everywhere. Even the modest ILO objective of a 2 per cent increase per year that already falls short of the pace needed to achieve the 2030 goal appears unachievable. Geopolitical shocks are used by detractors as proof of the need to suspend the establishment or expansion of social protection, or even to reduce painfully earned and acquired entitlements. They currently threaten the expansion of social protection, especially in Africa.

**This slowdown** shows that geopolitical circumstances that can deeply impact social protection in the short-term must not be trusted, when history shows that long-term trends are favourable to social development. Pausing prolongs the hardship of billions in poverty.

**Poverty eradication must not be protracted**; it is achievable everywhere with social protection. Historical examples of emergence from poverty abound; it is now a widespread reality in numerous countries, where social protection policy and actions demonstrate the extraordinary benefits of political determination to eradicate extreme poverty.

**Detractors of universal social protection argue** the costs are too high and that social protection is a persistent, inescapable financial burden that permanently drains resources from economic investments and economic productivity and growth, despite clear evidence to the contrary.

**Yet the goal of poverty eradication is not permanently assisting – and keeping - a population in poverty**. The ultimate goals are emergence and acquisition of self-sufficiency, moving toward increasingly shared prosperity. Nations hobbled by debt from loans to nurture their growth would reject the notion that they have put themselves in a permanent state of want, without hope to emerge from it. The same is true of persons in poverty, who may need some assistance to achieve self-sufficiency.

**The benefits to society of universal social protection are three-fold**

**First**, in keeping with the 2030 agenda of the United Nations and the human right to social security, universal social protection is core to Sustainable Development Goal 1 to end poverty and eradicate extreme poverty. **Populations in the millions, even billions**, especially in the informal economy, excluded from any form of social protection, are entitled to universal access to essential health care and income guarantees in periods of unemployment, sickness, maternity and old age, as well as to income guarantees for persons with disabilities, and to the income securing the nutrition and education children need.

At present, this obligation is met insufficiently by States, and sporadically by humanitarian assistance, domestic and foreign, provided in situations of urgency. Funding for these interventions is notoriously threatened.

**Second**, in keeping with ILO Recommendation 202 of 2012 and the human right to social insurance, universal social protection is designed to **prevent poverty**, by providing life-long support to populations of adults entitled to universal access to essential health care and income guarantees in periods of unemployment, sickness and maternity. Older persons of and persons with disabilities are entitled to sustained income support; and the children of such populations are entitled to income guarantees to assure their nutrition and education. In addition to accessibility and affordability, universal social protection calls for quality services, associated with decent working and employment conditions for all service providers. Universal social protection must alleviate the unfair distribution of unpaid care work, especially to women and girls, that curtails education and prevents women's access to paid work of benefit to them, families and society.

**Third**, social protection interventions are needed in crisis situations and emergencies, including situations of conflict, displacement and forced migration, extreme weather events and natural disasters. These interventions require a wider umbrella of social protection, including shelter and security, and are the least amenable to planning. Whereas demand for this social protection is increasing, its financing is shrinking everywhere, notably from non-domestic sources, calling for a different form of funding.

**Universal social protection is a powerful enabler** of the structural transformation required for climate adaptation, mitigation and climate resilience. In the interim, climate change is deepening poverty and inequality in the global South, especially Africa.

**Universal social protection expenditure is needed *now* for a just transition**, to anticipate shocks, protect incomes and livelihoods, support recovery and build resilience, and to avoid excessive future social protection expenditures.

**Universal social protection expenditures can be planned** on the basis of demographic and economic indicators, and their planning can include contingency funding earmarked for exceptional expenditures at times of crises and emergencies.

**Even so, social expenditures and universal social protection to end poverty are not - and should not - stand alone**; poverty is foremost an economic issue and the responsibility for poverty eradication lies with the State and government policies. Governments must abandon unfettered support for economic approaches that are in practice anti-distributional, that permit extraordinary concentration of wealth from assets and income by few on the backs of many, where money accumulates at the top, because the consequent inequality is the root cause of poverty and its persistence.

**Promoting, enabling and encouraging wealth cumulation** with policies that reinforce wealth accumulation, benefit capital during booms and protect capital first against shocks in times of crises do not provide benefits to the many through job creation and the supposed trickle-down effects of the rare prosperity. Moreover, such policies rob governments of the capacity to finance universal social protection, and deprive them of access to discretional funds in times of crisis.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

**In conclusion, we note that: -**

1. **The distortion of wealth and poverty** is deeply incompatible with the universal principles of the multilateral agenda to leave no-one behind to which all nations and peoples subscribe; to the contrary, skewed concentration of wealth rests on persons, societies and even whole populations being left behind.
2. **Social protection must not be used as a "safety-net" to service such an approach**, relegated to mopping up the worst fall-out of wealth accumulation, palliating the side-effects of the so-called "unintended" consequences - the collateral casualties or damage - of unfettered economic objectives, and leaving the root flaws of the system unaltered and authorized to persist.

**And we reason that: -**

**Fast-tracking universal social protection *now* is urgent**. It is the only valid response to current global circumstances, and to turn the tide of deepening economic and social injustice.

**Fulfilling the global commitment to universal social protection** will put the world back on the right path to truly global and inclusive social – and economic - development.