

58th Session of the Social Development Commission
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)
Representation: Mr. Genilson Geraldo (Brazilian librarian).

The 58th session of the Social Development Commission (CSocD58) took place from 10 to 19 February 2020, at the United Nations headquarters in New York. The Commission is the advisory body responsible for the social development pillar of global development. The meeting was a special one, marking the 75th anniversary of the Commission and the 25th of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development. 2020 is also a crucial year for the accelerated realization of inclusive societies and the reduction of inequalities everywhere for people of all ages, with only ten years to go to achieve the UN's 2030 Agenda.

The priority theme of CSocD58 was "Housing and social protection systems accessible to all, to deal with the homeless" and was attended by representatives of states, institutions, associations and civil society organisations from various countries.

The event aimed to adopt and develop comprehensive national intersectoral strategies and specific political interventions to deal with people on the street and in situations of social vulnerability.

The Commission sought to encourage national and local governments to improve access to affordable housing through integrated housing policies and social protection measures, both in demand and supply. It also invited national and local governments, in collaboration with the private sector and local communities, to encourage the provision of a variety of suitable, safe and affordable housing options for members of different income groups in society.

The Commission on Social Development (CSocD) has a central role in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), by which its 46 members are elected. Since the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, the CSocD has been responsible for monitoring and implementing the Copenhagen Declaration and Program of Action.

In this year of the 75th anniversary of the UN and the 25th anniversary of the Copenhagen Declaration on social development, the Commission's focus on

homelessness is a welcome step. Significantly, it is the first time that the UN has considered homelessness specifically as a political issue.

Civil society organisations played a very important role in the meeting. Homelessness is a global phenomenon and therefore needs a multilateral approach. The two advocacy points proposed by civil society were the need for a comprehensive and globally agreed definition of homelessness and meaningful measurement. Many African states, especially Madagascar, played a crucial role in highlighting this issue before and during the Commission. The side events held during the session also analysed the full range of events and issues related to homeless people, women, children, climate change, youth, conflicts, disasters and migration.

On the first day (10 February 2020), the UNDESA Under-Secretary-General opened the meeting, accompanied by a representative of Civil Society and a representative of Youth. Soon after, the agenda and other organisational matters were approved.

Having presented the priority theme - “affordable housing and social protection systems for all to serve the homeless”, - there were reviews of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action regarding the situation of social groups; discussion on emerging issues; and the inclusion of the discussion of the “twenty-five years of the World Summit for Social Development: facing the social challenges emerging from the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

During the first week, the Ministerial Forum took place, with the thematic focus “Twenty-five years of the World Summit for Social Development: Facing Emerging Societies challenges for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda”. The following authorities were present at the opening and throughout the event: Mr. Juan Somavia, Special Adviser to the Secretary General for Interregional Policy Cooperation, Mr. Guy Ryder, former ILO Director-General, Mr. Gbolié Desiré Wulfran IPO, General President of the Assembly, and Ms. Mona Juul, President of ECOSOC. At this Forum, Member States shared good national practices and lessons in promoting social development that have emerged since the Summit for Social Development (WSSD), offering an interactive dialogue with the public.

It also promoted discussions on multistakeholderism and the sharing of solutions, under the theme: “Popular housing and social services: protection

systems for all those who lack housing”, with the presence of Dr. Sam Tsemberis, founder and executive director of Pathways to Housing, and faculty at the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University Medical Center; Mr. Chris Gardner, author of the “Pursuit of Happiness”, businessman, speaker and philanthropist; Amanda Misiko Andere, MPA, CEO of Funders Together for Endlessness, and Mr. James Abro, prolific writer on poverty and homelessness in the United States.

There were interactive dialogues with senior UN system officials on current trends, good practices, innovation approaches, lessons learned at the regional level to strengthen the UN system's support to Member States.

On the fifth day (02/14/2020), the Civil Society Forum took place, with panels and interactive sessions, going into more depth on issues around the priority theme. The leaders of the forum declared that the year 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the world Summit for Social Development (WSSD), held in Copenhagen in March 1995. This landmark event was attended by 117 heads of state or Government, and saw them commit to fight against poverty, to offer job opportunities and to promote safe, just and humane societies. They also promised to put people at the centre of development. These principles guide the Social Assistance Commission.

The Civil Society Forum allowed all participants to bring to discussion the key theme of the Civil Society Declaration: “Housing and social protection systems accessible to all”, and focused on the central vision of each NGO, sharing the motivation of their private missions for the most needy, excluded and vulnerable.

On the eighth day of the session – 18 February 2020 – there were only side events and presentation of films and documentaries related to the main theme of the event. Interactive discussions took place with the participants about the films that had been screened. IFLA was able to use this opportunity to present its statement, pointing out its position on the theme of the event and the importance of including libraries as sociocultural support entities for people living on the streets and in social vulnerability.

Prepared by the IFLA General Secretariat, with the collaboration of the librarian Adriana Ferrari, President of the Brazilian Federation of Library Associations (FEBAB), the statement follows:

IFLA Statement on Homelessness:

58th Session of the Commission on Social Development

Your Excellencies, I am speaking on behalf of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, with members in 153 countries.

Libraries are a key part of the social infrastructure of any community, and so can be key partners in efforts to tackle the causes – and the effects – of homelessness.

As paragraph 4 of the background document points out, homelessness is not merely a lack of physical housing, but is also a loss of family, community and a sense of belonging. It is, too often, associated with a loss of other rights – to education, to health, to access to information and culture, each potentially deepening the problem, and representing an opportunity lost.

For many people experiencing homelessness, the opportunity to use a library means having a safe location to relax and take part in the cultural life of the community. As so many cases around the world show, by helping people experiencing homelessness feel welcome, libraries also help break down barriers with the rest of society.

Yet libraries are more than just spaces.

In Chile and Croatia, for example, they have proved their worth as stigma-free venues for offering support and training that helps people get back on their feet. Libraries can be portals, and complements, to other actions to help people get into stable housing and work.

It is estimated that between 20% and 25% of the public at the São Paulo State Library, located in Sao Paulo, Brazil, is made up of people in situations of vulnerability. The majority go there to access computers and read newspapers and magazines and report to the team that they consider the library to be a space for new opportunities. They also demonstrate that literary reading helps to deal with the daily challenges of survival.

Libraries are also places of empowerment. In New South Wales, Australia, for example, libraries have developed a strong access network to justice points,

with support for housing tenants looking for information about their rights the single biggest area of work for those involved.

Clearly, though, for this to work, we need governments – you – to ensure that there are no unreasonable boundaries to people experiencing homelessness. We are also honest with ourselves – there is always room for improvement in the way we welcome, understand needs, and deliver services for all those we serve.

So we therefore call on you to include libraries as core public services alongside schools and hospitals to help everyone improve their situation and find a long-term response to homelessness.

Thank you.

The receptivity on the IFLA statement to everyone present was positive, as everyone applauded and the moderator of the discussions and the UK representative, Mrs. Dame Louise Casey, praised the statement and commented on the importance of the work done by libraries and how much they become a crucial means of accessing information, culture and social assistance for people on the streets and social vulnerability.

On the last day of the session – 19 February 2020 – the Commission on Social Development drafted a resolution, calling on member countries to combat discrimination and negative stereotypes against people living on the streets, including strengthening anti-discrimination laws, advocacy and awareness of a popular housing policy, which, while essential, is not enough to end the scourge of social vulnerability, but needs to be accompanied by other measures, such as social protection policies.

The resolution defines homelessness as not only a lack of physical housing, but also as interrelated with poverty, lack of productive employment, lack of infrastructure and other social issues. So, the task now is to get involved at the national and local levels. The adopted resolutions will be adopted by the General Assembly in September 2020.

Ms. Mona Juul (Norway), President of the Economic and Social Council, said that the Commission's resolution on homelessness will contribute to the next Council session and the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. She added that this year's session was a good example of what the Commission

can offer, addressing multifaceted issues from a technical and focused perspective. She also noted that the General Assembly is reviewing this year how to strengthen the work of the Council itself and its functional committees to promote greater harmonisation and coordination of their respective agendas and work programmes.

Immediately after the closing of the 58th session, the Commission opened the first meeting of the fifty-ninth session. By acclamation, Martín García Moritán (Argentina) was elected as President and Sharifa Yousef Alnesf (Qatar) as Vice President.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS:

In parallel to the event, I want to highlight the opportunity to have been able to visit the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library, where I was warmly welcomed by librarian Ramona Kohrs, who is the institution's extension and professional development coordinator. I was able to get to know the institution's entire infrastructure, in addition to viewing its rich global collection and the official documents of the United Nations, also available in its digital library: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/>

With that, I take the opportunity to thank IFLA immensely for the honourable and special invitation to represent it, being certainly a moment that will be marked in my personal, professional and academic history, given that I am taking a master's degree in Information Science and study on the Sustainable Development, Social Development and Information Sustainability Goals.

I would also like to express my thanks to the Graduate Program in Information Science, from the Federal University of Santa Catarina - Brazil, in particular to Prof. Dr. Adilson Luiz Pinto and Profa. Dr. Marli Dias de Souza Pinto, for all the support and credibility. To friends, family and especially my companion Deunézio Cornelian Junior, for all his strength, support and messages of success and support.

In addition, to the entire staff of the IFLA General Secretariat, in particular to the Secretary General, Mr. Gerald Leitner and Mr. Stephen Wyber, who was always present to guide and give all support pre and throughout the event.

I conclude by leaving a message to all librarian friends, students and researchers, based on the Declaration of Civil Society of the 58th United Nations Commission on Social Development: *A home is one of the most basic human needs, without which a human being must live through precarious circumstances on the streets, under bridges, in slums or on public land, in unprotected areas and insecure improvised structures, with limited rights, few means to accomplish potential and without access to education and information. In addition, the number of vulnerable individuals and families living without a home is increasing in low-, middle- and high-income countries around the world. It is a problem beyond borders. It exists in all countries and in urban, suburban and rural contexts. We need to take the next step and link housing to social protection systems to provide home security for those trapped in poverty and subject to discrimination and vulnerability. We will together dedicate our efforts as professional librarians, carrying out social actions to these people in social vulnerability, whether in our libraries, information units, documentation and information centres or in scientific studies, with the objective of helping them in search of a life dignified and humane, in all its diverse circumstances, manifestations and wherever it occurs, because we intend to reach the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on a better life today and for future generations*

If you want to get more information, ask questions and make comments on this topic, I will be very happy to receive and answer your emails.

Contact:

Email: genilsongeraldo.biblio@gmail.com

Instagram: [@genilsongeraldo](#) e [@sustentabilidadeinformativa](#)