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UNITED NATIONS

OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN  
RIGHTS

SPECIAL PROCEDURES OF  
THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

**Expert meeting on the impact of recovery measures on the human rights  
of those living in extreme poverty**

**Geneva, 27<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup> January 2011  
OHCHR, Palais Wilson**

**Programme of Work**

**I. Objectives**

This workshop brings together experts from governments, international organisations, academic research institutions, and non-governmental organisations working on a diverse range of issues. It aims at creating a forum where they can discuss, provide input to, and advise on the forthcoming report of the Independent Expert on the Question of Human Rights and Extreme Poverty, Ms Magdalena Sepúlveda, which will be submitted to the Human Rights Council for its sixteenth session in June 2011.

With the worst of the global financial crisis perceived to be behind them, States are recalibrating fiscal policy away from crisis responses towards post-crisis fiscal consolidation, in order to reduce deficits and bring down debt. Though it is as yet unclear what percentage of fiscal contraction will imply reductions to social expenditure, it is expected that developing countries will experience disproportionately large cuts in social spending, and vulnerable populations will be the target of the most considerable changes in expenditure. To date, there has been little analysis of the impact of proposed reductions on the human rights of those living in extreme poverty, including their right to social security and adequate standard of living, particularly those of the most vulnerable groups.

Of particular concern is the serious threat to the continuation, expansion and improvement of social protection systems, which are critical to maintain the economic and social rights of the most vulnerable in times of economic crisis. Social protection refers to policies and programmes that aim to enable people to respond to various contingencies and manage levels of risk or deprivation that are deemed unacceptable by society, and the term encompasses both social insurance (contributory insurance schemes providing pre-specified support for affiliated members) and social assistance (initiatives providing both cash and in-kind assistance to those living in poverty).

Social protection mechanisms are an important means of offsetting deprivation and securing protection from shocks and crises. Moreover, social protection measures may help states to comply with several human rights obligations, such as the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, the right to education, the protection of the family and maternity benefits, the right to fair and equal remuneration for work, and the specific rights of vulnerable groups such as children, older persons and persons with disabilities. Furthermore, a number of human rights obligations require states to implement social protection policies; in particular, the right to social security and the right to an adequate standard of living enshrined in the Universal



Declaration of Human Rights, several international and regional human rights treaties<sup>1</sup>, ILO conventions,<sup>2</sup> and national constitutions. Ensuring access to social protection is thus not a policy option, but a State obligation under international human rights law. The current trend of reducing social expenditure and, in particular, funding to social protection systems, threatens to undermine these human rights obligations, and thus warrants examination from a human rights perspective.

The report of the Independent Expert should provide an assessment of how recovery plans including reductions in social expenditure impact upon the enjoyment of human rights of those living in extreme poverty, especially the most vulnerable groups in society and, in particular, women and children. It should examine whether such policies are sufficient to allow for the achievement of national development goals, including the MDGs, and whether they are in accordance with states' various international commitments on human rights. It should also identify alternative policies that might prioritise social needs and allow for a recovery for all.

## **II. Format**

The workshop is designed to maximise discussion. It will be a round table discussion, where each session will be introduced by brief presentations, which will serve as a basis to open the debates.

The afternoon of the second day will be allocated to receiving advice on the content of the report to be submitted by the Independent Expert to the United Nations Human Rights Council. The aim is to take a human rights approach to issues of fiscal contraction and cuts in social expenditure, in order to identify the key challenges to the human rights of those living in extreme poverty, particularly the most vulnerable.

The Independent Expert has endeavoured to bring together a diverse group of people to discuss this issue. The meeting need not conform to any strict boundaries, but should be an opportunity for the participants – many of whom have no human rights background – to have a nuanced and challenging discussion about the social and economic effects of post-crisis recovery efforts. The Independent Expert's ultimate aim is to draw from the discussion a number of recommendations to states about how recovery efforts should best be structured to protect, promote and fulfil human rights, particularly those of the most vulnerable in society.

To facilitate the discussion, we have identified some of the questions we would like the meeting to address (see Annex 1). However, we reiterate that these are merely suggestions and ought not constrain discussion, nor prevent anyone from raising different issues.

## **III. Meeting Venue**

The meeting will be held at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):

Room 1-016 (first floor)  
Palais Wilson  
52 rue des Paquis  
Quai Wilson, 1201  
Genève

You will be required to go through security at Palais Wilson. Please bring your passport with you. We will be providing a list of participants to the security desk prior to the meeting.

The meeting room should have a computer and projector screen, however wireless internet connections are not guaranteed. If you are presenting, please make sure to have a printed copy of your presentation and save the file to a memory stick.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Articles 9, 10 and 11 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereinafter ICESCR), Article 5 (iv) International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (hereinafter ICERD), Article 11 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (hereinafter CEDAW), Article 26 Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter CRC), Article 27 of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (hereinafter ICRMW), and Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

<sup>2</sup> See, inter alia, Declaration of Philadelphia and Convention No. 102 on Minimum Standards of Social Security (1952).

## DRAFT AGENDA

<b>DAY ONE Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2011</b>	
9:00	<b>Registration at Palais Wilson</b>
9:15-9:45	<b>Introduction</b>  Welcome: Mara Bustelo, Special Procedures Branch, OHCHR Objectives for the meeting: Magdalena Sepúlveda, Independent Expert on extreme poverty Introduction of UNICEF's work on this topic: Matthew Cummins Self-introduction of participants
9:45-11:15	<b>1. The human rights framework</b>  Brief presentations: Radhika Balakrishnan, Malcolm Langford
11:15-11:30	<b>Coffee Break</b>
11:30-13:00	<b>2. Impact of the global economic crisis on the most vulnerable groups in society</b>  Brief presentations: Sarah Cook, Eve Crowley
13:00-14:00	<b>Lunch</b>
14:00-15:30	<b>3. Crisis responses and the protection of human rights</b>  Brief presentations: Nicholas Lusiani, Almudena Fernandez
15:30-15:45	<b>Coffee Break</b>
15:45-17:30	<b>4. Recovering from the crisis: are states protecting or threatening the rights of the most vulnerable?</b>  Brief presentations: Matthew Cummins, Diane Elson
Evening	<b>Group Dinner at Restaurant (<i>Location &amp; Time TBD</i>)</b>

<b>DAY TWO Friday, January 28 2011</b>	
9:00-10:45	<b>5. How to ensure a recovery for all? Social protection programmes</b>  Brief presentations: Simone Cecchini, Krzysztof Hagemejer
10:45-11:00	<b>Coffee Break</b>
11:00-12:30	<b>6. How to ensure a recovery for all? Public employment and employment guarantee programmes</b>  Brief presentations: Ian Orton
12:30-13:30	<b>Lunch</b>
13.30-14:30	<b>7. How to ensure a recovery for all? The role of the international community</b>  Brief presentations: Malcolm Langford
14:30-15:30	<b>Recommendations for the Independent Expert's Report</b>  Chair: Magdalena Sepúlveda
15:30-15:45	<b>Coffee break</b>
15:45-17:00	<b>Recommendations for the Independent Expert's Report</b>