



PERMANENT MISSION OF NORWAY

**Speech at/to: ECOSOC**

**By Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, Norway**

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Prime minister,  
Deputy Secretary-General,  
Director General,  
President of ECOSOC,  
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first of all thank the President of ECOSOC for his kind invitation to speak to you here today.

It is a special honour also to share the podium with my fellow co-chair of the Panel on Systemwide Coherence, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz. Pakistan is making important progress socially and economically under your leadership and the leadership of President Musharraf. Pakistan is opening its economy, inviting investment and reaping benefits of globalization and reform. And I commend you also for the guidance and leadership and insight that you are bringing to the Panel on UN reform which is meeting today and tomorrow.

It is an honour also to share the podium with Director General Juan Somavia, who for many years have been the most ardent proponent of this important agenda of employment and social progress. Norway sees the ILO as one of the most important international organizations that has ever been created. The strong will be just and the weak secure only as long as protection of worker's rights is overseen by a global institution. And ILO has a unique system of membership, directly involving the employers as well as employees organizations. Its history is paved with milestones of human progress.

As you know Norway is fortunate to have a prosperous economy and almost full employment. People sometimes ask me what we produce in Norway, - beside oil and gas, - or what we are known for.

I believe the greatest product we have developed is the welfare state. One of the worlds most equitable, secure, competitive and innovative welfare states. And this is not only a question of having sufficient financial resources available. We became prosperous because we developed the welfare state.

If we look back some decades, there where economists, politicians writers, who suggested that the time of the Nordic welfare state had peaked and would decline. They predicted that countries with weaker social policies would be tomorrow's winners.

But that did not happen. If you look at the international statistics, - be they the UN's Human development indicators, or the Geneva based World Economic Forums competitiveness report, = the Nordic countries are always among the top ten.

So a system of extensive worker's protection, a public and universal social security system, and even a relatively high level of taxation are not economic liabilities.

They give us a competitive advantage.

More equal opportunities and fair outcomes for all are basic reasons why we have a high national income. We are a market economy, yes, but we have found a balance between the state and the market.

And every year we are working hard to improve that system. Because there will always be shortages even in the most developed economy.

My main message today, however, is that the greatest gains countries can achieve, economically as well politically, come with empowering women, ensuring equal opportunity, health care, and increasing the ratio of women's active participation in working life.

Let me share with you some of the experiences we have made in Norway. Because we have not always been in the front:

In the 1970ies, Norway had one of the lowest ratios of women's employment in Europe.

Today, we have one of the highest, if not the highest.

Iceland, I believe, is higher.

If our ratio had been lower, - for example on the same level as Germany, - the total number of people employed would have been about 200 000 less than what it is today.

And that in a country of 4,5 million people.

And our economic performance would have been equally lower.

But this increase of women's employment did not come by itself. It did not accidentally happen.

It came as a result of systematic policy changes aimed at empowering women and giving them more equal opportunity.

It came as a result of greatly extended maternity leave rules.

Including greatly improved maternity leave benefits.

Today, we are working hard on increasing the numbers of kindergardens and day-care centres.

These policies allow women to choose - both to have family and children,

- and a professional lives and income as well.

So I would like to make the following assertion

Empowering women is a competitive advantage.

Building kindergardens is a competitive advantage.

Improving women's educational opportunity is a competitive advantage.

Those countries are most competitive and yield the best economic performance which offer women the most equal opportunity.

And those countries who manage to overcome existing cultural impediments to such policies - be it in the North or in the South, - are going to grow and prosper.

This is our experience. And hard figures support my conclusions.

This is also why we are working with many of you to improve the conditions of women and children.

Because a healthy, well educated population is any country's most important asset.

Norway is working on all 8 Millennium Development Goals, including no 3 and no 5 on gender equality and maternal health.

But we have made the decision to contribute in a special way to actually achieving the MDG No. 4 on reducing child mortality by two-thirds by 2015.

I want to see this achieved.

Children are the future.

It is unnecessary and unacceptable that a child dies every third second,

- that more than 26 000 children die every day,

- and that more than 10 million children die every year.

One forth of these children can be saved by vaccines available today or in the very near future.

This is possible

This is affordable

How can we justify not doing it?

As a father, I have been sensitized to the injustice that all Norwegian infants are immunized, whereas in parts of Asia and Africa only one in five receive the magic shots.

As an economist, I could appreciate that immunization is the most cost-effective means of preventing disease and child mortality and that vaccine programmes are key to economic growth in poor countries.

As a politician I have the privilege to do something about it.

In total, Norway will contribute one billion dollars to vaccines and immunization through 2015.

If we succeed in working effectively together, we can proudly tell the citizens of the world, 10 years from now, that we changed history.

That more countries became safer and more equitable societies.

And truly, nothing offers more hope for the future than the look in the eye of a healthy child ready for life.

Ready for education.

Ready to realize the talent with which they were born and raised.

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Mr. President.

We all know the importance of the United Nations. Not only as an arena for norms and common solutions to common problems, but also as an agent for peace, development, human rights and dignity at the country level.

The world of today is different from the world when the UN was created.

The UN too has changed, but we see a UN with a growing gap between what is expected of it, and what its resources permit it to do.

We have to bring the United Nations up to date. The most radical decision we can make about the UN and how it should be organized is to decide that we will not change it.

I believe that we who are the staunchest supporters of a strong and effective UN,

we must also be the key drivers of change and renewal of the UN.

Change is necessary for every organization, private or public. We must bring an end to duplications, fragmentation and rivalries. We must get as much as we can out of the system, focusing on impact rather than who does what within the UN family.

Not to pay less to the UN.

But we need to spend less on bureaucracy and more in the field. We need to get more development, more humanitarian relief and more environment protection.

If we manage to save resources. Which I believe will. Let us pledge to use it all for development.

These observations are guiding principles for my co-chairmanship of the Secretary General's Panel on Systemwide Coherence.

President,

We regret that the trade negotiations did not succeed last week here in Geneva.

But we still have a binding global regime for trade and with effective dispute settlement and sanctions.

We have not been able to agree on a similarly regime to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights and Decent Work for all.

The rules we have developed to ensure protection of the environment are particularly fragmented. And enforcement mechanisms are weak.

We must not run the risk that competition for trade and investment undermines our ability to promote and protect the common good. Social dumping is the antidote of unchecked globalization.

Thus, a truly comprehensive agenda to generate full and productive employment and decent work for all, with a positive impact on sustainable development, will require comprehensive governance at both the national and global levels.

To quote Director General Somavia in his speech when visiting Oslo earlier this year:  
"Nationally and internationally, we need to develop policies that create level playing fields for all, in economic, social and environmental issues."

The Director General also said that we must start thinking of an international system of compliance to advance the respect for international labour standards.

This will take our vision and will to realize our long term self-interest in pursuing the common good. This the greatest challenge to us all !

Thank you.