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BRIEFING

The second United Nations World Social Summit 2025

A milestone in the struggle for global social rights?

by Jens Martens

From 4-6 November 2025, the United Nations (UN) will hold the second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD2) in Doha, Qatar. The first summit on social development took place 30 years ago in Copenhagen. The initiative for a new World Social Summit came from UN Secretary-General António Guterres. He had already spoken out in favour of a global summit in his 2021 Our Common Agenda report. At the time, he took up an initiative from the Club de Madrid. This association of former heads of state and government had pointed out that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated the global dynamics of inequality and exclusion and widened the social divide. Progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had been massively delayed by the pandemic. A stronger commitment to the social goals of the 2030 Agenda was therefore considered necessary – for example, in the form of a new social contract. A second World Social Summit has been proposed to address this.

The UN Member States adopted this demand and decided to hold a summit in 2025. Its general aim is stated as follows:

> *"to address the gaps and recommit to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action and its implementation and give momentum towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda."* (General Assembly Resolution 78/261 of 26 February 2024).

This briefing paper provides information on the background, the political framework, the expectations and the preparatory process for the second World Social Summit. As in 1995, this summit will be held against a difficult political backdrop. Thirty years ago, the first World Social Summit was the 'social democratic' response to the neoliberal policies of the Reagan/Thatcher era and the Washington Consensus propagated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In 2025, radical market and reactionary policy recipes are on the rise again. Social rights and the goals of social justice are under attack in many places around the world. But this is precisely why the second World Social Summit is a crucial opportunity to anchor social justice on the global political agenda again. Despite significant challenges, the summit has the potential to bring together progressive civil society actors, trade unions, academics and political forces to work together to strengthen the social dimension of sustainable development.

1. Review: The historical significance of the first World Social Summit

In March 1995, representatives of the then 185 UN Member States – including 117 heads of state and government (among them Helmut Kohl, Nelson Mandela, François Mitterrand and Fidel Castro) – came together in Copenhagen for the first World Summit on Social Development "to recognize the importance of social development and the well-being of all people and to give these goals the

highest priority now and into the 21st century." These are the opening words of the Copenhagen Declaration, which was adopted at the summit.

The summit took place a few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and following the failure of the real-socialist development model. Many countries in the Global South were struggling with the catastrophic consequences of neoliberal structural adjustment policies. In the run-up to the summit, the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) had addressed the social consequences of globalization in its comprehensive States of Disarray report and used numerous examples to demonstrate how deregulation and economic liberalization had contributed to increasing unemployment, poverty and inequality.

Three years earlier, the historic UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) had taken place in Rio de Janeiro. Here the states adopted a global action programme for sustainability for the first time with Agenda 21. The social dimension of sustainable development was now to take centre stage in Copenhagen. According to the then Chilean UN Ambassador Juan Somavia, who is regarded as the spiritual father of the World Social Summit, Copenhagen was intended to replace economic growth with 'social growth' as the central political objective.

The three main themes of the World Social Summit were: combating poverty, creating productive employment and promoting social integration. The governments formulated 10 commitments on these topics in the final declaration, which were (more or less) concretized in the Copenhagen Programme of Action.

Some of the commitments were extremely ambitious in their wording and, as they have not yet been fulfilled, are still relevant today. In particular, this applies to the commitment of "eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national action and international cooperation". The goal of full employment was set out as a basic priority of economic and social policies. Similarly, social integration was to be promoted through the protection of human rights, non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equal opportunities, solidarity, security and participation of all people.

In order to fulfill these commitments, resources for social development should be significantly increased. It was in this context that Inge Kaul, then Director of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report first brought the concept of a Currency Transaction Tax (or Tobin Tax) into the political discussion in Copenhagen. However, this proposal was not reflected in the summit's final documents, nor was the demand for an annual 3 percent reduction in military spending in favour of social development *(peace dividend)*.

Eventually, the decisions of Copenhagen ensured that aspects of social justice remained on the international political agenda over the following years. Some saw this as the real success of the summit. In the follow-up process, civil society coalitions were formed in many countries, which set themselves the task of monitoring the implementation of the Copenhagen commitments by their governments. At a global level, they joined forces to form the Social Watch network.

Parallel to the welfare state approach of the World Social Summit, neoliberal concepts – as propagated by the Bretton Woods Institutions – continued to influence the development discourse. In order to reconcile the competing development approaches, after 1995 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the IMF and the UN made a joint effort to define a set of core development policy goals on which a comprehensive political consensus was to be established. The result was the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a narrowly defined set of eight goals, mainly in the areas of poverty reduction and social development, which were primarily relevant for the poorer countries of the Global South. These superseded the more comprehensive approach of the Copenhagen Action Programme and dominated the development policy discourse after the year 2000.

This only changed 15 years later when the UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals once again take into account all dimensions of sustainable development and are relevant to all countries in the world. This amounted to a paradigm shift which, in view of the proclaimed transformation towards a sustainable economic and social system, effectively turned all countries in the world into 'developing countries'.

The core topics of the World Social Summit also feature prominently in the 2030 Agenda and its goals. According to SDG 1, extreme income poverty (defined since June 2025 as a per capita income of less than US$ 3 per day) should be eradicated

everywhere in the world by 2030. In addition, the proportion of people living in poverty ('in all its dimensions'), according to the respective national definitions, is to be at least halved. Another target, not only to overcome poverty but also to prevent it, is the introduction and expansion of social protection systems (SDG 1.3).

SDG 8 aims, among other things, to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and people with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value by 2030 (SDG 8.5).

For the first time in a UN document, governments have committed to reducing inequality within and among countries in SDG 10, promoting social, economic and political inclusion and ensuring equal opportunities.

However, the track record of SDG implementation to date shows that there has not been sufficient progress on many of the goals. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the global dynamics of inequality and exclusion and widened the social divide. This has prompted the UN Secretary-General to call for a stronger commitment to the social goals of the 2030 Agenda in his **Our Common Agenda** report. A second World Social Summit is designed to serve this purpose, as António Guterres explained:

"The Summit outcome could be an update of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, covering issues such as universal social protection floors, including universal health coverage, adequate housing, education for all and decent work, and give momentum towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals." (p. 30).

2. Stagnation instead of progress: social development indicators paint a bleak picture

A look at some of the key indicators of social development shows that there is an urgent need for action.

The number of people living in extreme **poverty** – i.e. living on less than US$ 3 per day **according to the World Bank's updated definition** – is estimated to be 808 million in 2025. Although this is 1.5 billion fewer people than in 1990, the goal of completely overcoming extreme poverty will not be achieved for decades at the current rate.

Based on a multidimensional concept of poverty – according to which poverty is also reflected in a lack of access to education, culture and social participation, for example – the figure is higher. According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, **UNPD in 2024** estimates the number of people living in multidimensional poverty at 1.1 billion.

It would be absurd to believe that poverty would be overcome if all people had a per capita income of at least US$ 3 per day. This poverty line can at best mark the threshold of survival, but not the threshold of an "adequate standard of living", as granted to all people as a right in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The World Bank has therefore introduced US$ 4.20 and US$ 8.30 as additional poverty thresholds for middle-income countries. Based on the latter figure, 3.73 billion people are considered poor. This represents 45 percent of the world's population (see Table 1).

Many people still live in poverty even though they are employed and are therefore among the *working poor.* According to the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** (see p. 14), more than 240 million people worldwide were living in extreme poverty in 2024 despite being in work.

This puts into perspective the fact that the global **unemployment rate** reached a record low of 5 percent in 2024. In addition, the rate is still significantly higher for women and young people. According to the ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2025 (p. 7), 20.4 percent of young people worldwide were neither in training or employment (NEET) in 2024. The data reveals striking gender disparities: 28.2 percent of young women were NEET, more than twice the rate of young men at 13.1 percent.

In 2024, 58.2 percent of the global workforce was in **informal employment.** In low-income countries, the rate was as high as 88.5 percent. Most of these workers have no access to social security at all. The proportion of precarious workers has risen even higher after the COVID-19 crisis, as the economic recovery has been accompanied by an expansion of the informal sector in many places.

Table 1: Updated poverty figures worldwide (forecast for 2025)

Region	Poverty threshold		
	US$ 3 (extreme poverty)	US$ 4.20	US$ 8.30
	Number of people in millions		
Europe and Central Asia	4.29	9.45	45.09
East Asia and Pacific	40.45	117.85	592.47
South Asia	94.90	394.95	1,514.80
Middle East and North Africa	43.41	71.98	224.18
Sub-Saharan Africa	587.17	821.30	1,163.97
Latin America and the Caribbean	30.25	56.42	175.77
Other high-income countries	7.73	9.08	16.91
World	**808.20**	**1,481.03**	**3,733.19**

Source: https://pip.worldbank.org/home (values in 2021 purchasing power parities)

According to the World Social Protection Report 2024-2026, the proportion of people covered by at least one social benefit has risen to more than half of the world's population (52.4 percent) for the first time. However, this also means that **3.8 billion people** still live **without any social security.** The ILO calculates that, at the current rate of progress, it would take another 49 years – until 2073 – for all people to be covered by at least one social benefit. There are still striking differences between countries. While high-income countries are moving towards universal coverage for their populations (85.9 percent), the proportion of people with access to social security systems in low-income countries has barely increased since 2015 at 9.7 percent.

The main reason for this is the continuing **massive funding gap,** especially in poorer countries. While an average of 16.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) is spent on social security in high-income countries, this figure is just 1.1 percent in low-income countries.

According to ILO calculations, low- and middle-income countries need an additional US$ 1.4 trillion or 3.3 percent of the aggregate GDP (2024) of these countries each year to guarantee a minimum level of social security, of which 2 percent of GDP or US$ 833.4 billion is for basic healthcare alone.

In his current SDG Progress Report 2025, the UN Secretary-General points out that the ILO member states made a commitment to establishing, maintaining and implementing universal and rights-based **social protection floors** back in 2012. They are also a key instrument for reducing socio-economic inequality.

The development organization Oxfam has been warning for years that global **inequality** is continuing to worsen (see their 2025 report, for example). According to Oxfam's analysis, there were 204 new billionaires worldwide in 2024, bringing their total number to 2,769. And the figures continued to rise. According to the latest figures from Forbes, there were 3,028 billionaires with a total wealth of 16.1 trillion US dollars in 2025 – nearly 2 trillion more than a year before. This contrasts with stagnating poverty figures, while the number of people living in hunger worldwide has actually risen by 152 million to 733 million since 2019.

An important instrument against the expansion of socio-economic inequality is the enforcement of **trade union and workers' rights.** However, here too the UN Secretary-General notes a trend in the wrong direction in his SDG Progress Report 2025 (para. 82). According to this report, compliance with workers' rights has deteriorated by an average of 7 percent worldwide since 2015. The sharpest decline was recorded in the least developed countries (LDCs) (-45.4 percent). However, there was also a decline of 16.5 percent in high-income countries. The ongoing violations of workers' rights are undermining trade union freedom and increasingly restricting civil society's scope for action *(shrinking space).*

The deterioration of the social situation in many countries around the world was also a consequence of the global economic crises in 2007–2009 and 2020–2022. In response, austerity policies were revived in many places. In a 2022 report, Isabel Ortiz and Matthew Cummins showed that 143 countries had planned cuts in public budgets by 2025. Many countries are facing shrinking government revenues or are already in an acute debt crisis.

Against this backdrop, calls to link the disbursement of loans to the reduction of social expenditures proved to be counterproductive. According to a 2021 study by Oxfam, the IMF demanded cuts in the social sector for 85 percent of the loans approved during the COVID-19 pandemic – with potentially serious consequences for the most vulnerable sections of the population.

ActionAid International came to a similar conclusion in May 2025 in its empirical study, The Human Cost of Public Sector Cuts in Africa. Using the example of six African countries – Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi and Nigeria – the development organization shows how austerity measures have led to a significant deterioration in the public health and education sectors over the last five years. Across the six countries, 84 percent of teachers surveyed reported a decline in real income of between 10 and 50 percent since 2020. Meanwhile, 97 percent of health workers described their salary as insufficient to cover their living costs.

There is growing concern that austerity policies may intensify in many countries, especially in light of recent cuts in Official Development Assistance (ODA), as documented by the OECD.

3. Reactions: A human rights-based policy of social justice

In response to the deteriorating social situation, many civil society organizations, trade unions, academics and UN institutions have called for policies to be more closely aligned with social development goals. Their demands paved the way for the second World Social Summit.

Back in 2020, more than 500 organizations and academics from 87 countries called on the IMF and finance ministries worldwide to end austerity policies and instead support policies that address exclusion and injustice. This project was transferred to the End Austerity Campaign in 2022. This names numerous alternatives to rigid austerity policies, including:

- higher taxation of the wealthy and large corporations
- the introduction of digital and excess profit taxes
- debt cuts
- better prosecution of tax evasion and
- a restructuring of public spending towards more investment in the social sector.

More than 200 civil society organizations and trade unions are also campaigning for the establishment of a Global Fund for Social Protection. They would like to see this fund primarily support low-income countries in establishing, expanding and financing social security systems. One of the advocates of this initiative is the UN Secretary-General, who included the proposal in his 2021 Our Common Agenda report. In September 2021, the UN Secretary-General also launched the initiative for a Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions. The initiative aims to create at least 400 million new jobs by 2030, primarily in the green economy and in the care economy, and to extend basic social protection to the almost four billion people who are currently excluded from it.

The trade unions' demands for a New Social Contract as a collective commitment to the realization of key workers' rights around the world are also in line with this.

For Paola Simonetti and Giulia Massobrio from the International Trade Union Confederation

(ITUC) (p. 27), such a social contract should include the following six elements:

1. **Creation of decent and climate-friendly jobs with just transition:** Industrial transformation to achieve net-zero carbon emissions, along with investments in strategic economic sectors, such as the care economy, the green economy and sustainable infrastructure.

2. **Rights for all workers,** regardless of their employment arrangements, to fulfill the promise of the ILO Centenary Declaration with its labour protection floor including rights, maximum working hours, living minimum wages and health and safety at work.

3. **Minimum living wages and equal pay policies,** by enforcing statutory minimum wages that guarantee dignity for all workers and their families, and putting forward equal pay policies to guarantee equal pay for work of equal value.

4. **Universal social protection,** including the establishment of a Social Protection Fund for the least wealthy countries.

5. **Equality:** Ending all discrimination, such as by race or gender, through inclusive labour market policies, redistributive public policies and collective bargaining.

6. **Inclusion:** Ensuring a truly inclusive multilateral system, engaged in redressing the current imbalance of power and wealth, and where developing countries have the policy space to define their developmental models and use social dialogue as a key means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) has taken up the idea of the New Social Contract and added the ecological dimension to it. The vision of a new **eco-social contract** differs fundamentally from the arrangements between capital and labour that characterized the social contracts of the twentieth century. They argue that a new eco-social contract should be based on human rights, go hand in hand with a new fiscal contract that raises sufficient resources for climate and the implementation of the SDGs, strive for economies in harmony with nature, take gender justice and historical injustices into account and be based on new forms of solidarity-based cooperation between social movements and progressive alliances from science, politics and civil society. **Katja Hujo from UNRISD** summarizes the concept as follows:

"A twenty-first-century eco-social contract, in terms of process and outcome, will reflect a reconfiguration of a range of relationships that have become sharply imbalanced – those between state and citizen, between capital and labor, between the global North and the global South, between humans and the natural environment. It will be based on rebalancing hegemonic gender roles, resetting dominant discourses, and uprooting relations grounded in patriarchy and cultural norms. It will help define rights and obligations, promote greater equality and solidarity, and provide legitimacy, credibility, trust and buy-in for reforms underpinning transformative change. It will serve to reduce inequalities in all their dimensions, help us to recover from Covid-19 in an equitable and transformative way, and improve our resilience for shocks and crises yet to come." (p. 12f)

In UNRISD's view, the second World Social Summit could be an important milestone in making progress towards a new eco-social contract.

4. On the way to the second World Social Summit: positions and possible outcomes

The decision to hold a World Social Summit under the official title 'Second World Summit for Social Development' was made by the UN Member States in a General Assembly resolution on 26 February 2024. The general objective of the summit is described as follows:

"to address the gaps and recommit to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Program of Action and its implementation and give momentum towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda." (GA Resolution 78/261)

The summit is designed to result in a concise, action-oriented political declaration, which is to be agreed in advance by consensus as part of intergovernmental negotiations in New York.

In the **Modalities Resolution** of 16 July 2024, the Member States specified the format of the summit and the further preparatory process. Accordingly, the summit is to take place at the level of heads of state and government from 4–6 November 2025 in Doha, Qatar.

The Permanent Representatives of Belgium and Morocco were appointed as co-facilitators for the negotiation process. As a first step, they called on the Member States to send them their proposals for the political declaration. These were incorporated into a **Food for Thought Paper**, which was published on 7 March 2025.

In it, they formulated the lessons of the last three decades:

"that incremental change is not sufficient. Strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development requires more than short-term fixes or reactive measures in times of crisis." (p. 3)

Necessary are:

"bold and effective social policies that are woven into a whole-of-government, whole-of-society, people-centered, and integrated approaches." (p. 3)

Of particular importance here is the:

"funding of social protection floors, with particular attention to the needs of people in impoverished and vulnerable situations and strengthening social protection systems to guarantee universal coverage, providing stability and security across the life course. Member States may wish to consider a realistic target to extend social protection coverage by at least two percentage points per year." (p. 4)

The basic aim should be:

"a renewed global social contract anchored in the respect for human and labor rights and fundamental freedoms." (p. 8)

The Food for Thought Paper is relatively abstract and contains few concrete policy recommendations. The **World Social Report 2025** – published by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the UN University World Institute for Development and Economic Research (UNU-WIDER) in April 2025 under the title 'A New Policy Consensus to Accelerate Social Progress' – goes into greater detail. It forms an important substantive basis for the second World Social Summit. The World Social Report 2025 calls for policy-making to be viewed through a social lens and for social objectives to be systematically taken into account in all policy areas, above all tax policies. What is needed is a new political consensus based on the principles of "equity, economic security for all, and solidarity". Important building blocks here are political institutions that reduce the concentration of power and wealth, as well as intensified international cooperation.

Further substantive contributions came from the UN Inter-Agency Task Force (UN IATF), which was set up in preparation for the summit. It produced three **Non-papers** on the main topics of the summit, namely **poverty eradication, social inclusion** and **full employment** and **decent work for all**.

Based on this input and several rounds of consultations, the co-facilitators published the **Zero Draft** for the summit's political declaration on 25 April 2025. It formed the basis for the subsequent negotiations, which took place in informal consultations in New York from 9 May 2025. The co-facilitators had presented a roadmap for this in a **letter to the Member States**. However, contrary to the Modalities Resolution's claim that the preparations should be carried out in a "most effective, well-structured and broad participatory manner", the consultations were held behind closed doors. Unlike in the preparatory process of the first World Social Summit and in other policy processes, such as the Financing for Development process, non-state actors had no opportunity to participate.

The ten-page Zero Draft consists of four parts:

- A **vision for the future:** It emphasizes the commitment to human dignity, social justice, peace and equality. The essence is: "We are convinced that addressing today's social challenges requires strengthening international solidarity, building trust, and a renewed commitment to multilateral action on the social pillar of sustainable development, innovative solutions, and inclusive international cooperation to fully translate the promises into concrete outcomes for all." (p. 3)

- A **commitment to fundamental principles:** In addition to the Copenhagen commitments, it reaffirms in particular the 2030 Agenda and the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to development.

- A **Call to Action:** This main part of the political declaration contains specific commitments to eradicate poverty, promote decent work, improve social inclusion and address cross-cutting issues such as food security, health, digital transformation, gender equality, housing and migration. This part also contains a section on financing social development. Among other things, it

provides for a commitment to increase investment in social policy, including social protection systems, but without specifying this in more detail.

» Proposals for **follow-up and review:** The establishment of a structured review mechanism is envisaged, including a review every five years under the auspices of the General Assembly and a strengthening of the Commission for Social Development (CSOCD), which is based at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The Zero Draft met with general approval from many Member States. **As spokesperson for the G77 and China,** Iraq called it a "good basis for the negotiations". The group emphasized that the political declaration should highlight structural global inequalities and the right to development. It would like to see more explicit statements on a number of topics, such as the importance of ODA, the need to reduce customs barriers and non-tariff trade barriers and unhindered access to medical products.

Stavros Lambrinidis, Head of the EU Delegation to the UN in New York, also called the Zero Draft a good starting point for the negotiations. The EU agrees with many of the statements in the draft text, such as the holistic approach to combating poverty and the special emphasis on the gender perspective. The EU proposes a separate section on social protection and emphasizes the central role of the ILO in promoting social justice and decent work for all. They would like to see the **Global Coalition for Social Justice**, which was launched by the ILO in 2023, to play an important role in the follow-up to the summit.

The call to look beyond traditional economic approaches is noteworthy. The EU states:

"Committing to the global social development agenda is not just the right thing for us to do, but also a strategic economic decision. We emphasize the Economy of Wellbeing approach, which underlines the mutually reinforcing nature of economic growth and wellbeing. Policies and structures supporting social development and human capital are investments providing economic and social returns as well as stability, security and resilience for societies, often not reflected in GDP numbers alone."

The **representative of Norway** agreed with the generally positive assessment of the Zero Draft. He only highlighted a few points that should be emphasized more strongly in the political declaration. These include the importance of social dialogue between trade unions and employers, the special mention of marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) people and people with disabilities, as well as fair and effective taxation and the fight against corruption and illicit financial flows as key factors for economic growth and social development.

The apparent lack of controversy about the Zero Draft among most governments may be due to its highly general wording, which largely avoids specific obligations. This applies in particular to the section on financing social development. The aim here is obviously not to anticipate the decisions of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development **(FfD4)**, which will take place in Sevilla from 30 June to 3 July 2025.

Civil society organizations have formulated much more specific and far-reaching demands in the run-up to the negotiations. In February 2025, for example, the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) published a comprehensive list of key messages and recommendations for the second World Social Summit under the title **Achieving Global Social Justice**. It summarized them into the following three overarching points:

"A. All governments – insofar as they have not already done so – are to commit to develop national implementation and financing plans for universal social protection floors by the end of 2028, to prepare for the launch of a new era of social protection after the conclusion of the 2030 sustainable development agenda.

B. National resources and domestic revenues will in most cases be sufficient to ensure the needed expansion of social protection. Where resources are insufficient, the international community and the international financial institutions are strongly recommended to establish programs and policies to meet the needs of grants and loans to support governments financially and technically to implement or expand universal social protection systems.

C. National plans and the achievement of their implementation should be reviewed every five years on the basis of a surveillance and monitoring mechanism established for that purpose (…)."

Given the vague wording of the Zero Draft, some observers are concerned that the summit in Doha will fall far short of what is needed in light of the global crises. In a **joint article** for the Inter Press Service (IPS) news agency, economists Isabel

Ortiz, Odile Frank and Gabriele Köhler (Global Social Justice) note a lack of ambition and warn against missing a unique opportunity. They point out that the second World Social Summit is a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" for governments and the UN to address serious social grievances and reaffirm the global commitment to social justice. However, they argue, the final declaration of the summit must offer more than just aspirational language and should include binding measures with concrete commitments. They highlight a long list of areas for action, including measures to reduce income and wealth inequality, gender equality, the provision of high-quality public services and the ringfencing of social development from budget cuts, privatization and blended finance.

Given the current geopolitical atmosphere, it is unlikely that the second World Social Summit will succeed in adopting such an ambitious final document. For some observers, the summit would already be a success if a political declaration was adopted that had not been watered down to the point of meaninglessness.

However, in the words of the then Danish Prime Poul Rasmussen back in 1995: "The true significance of the summit will be measured by what happens after the summit". The same applies 30 years later. The decisive factor will be whether the second World Social Summit succeeds in permanently anchoring the 'social question' higher up the international agenda. This will only succeed if a follow-up process is established after the summit in which the Commission for Social Development and the Global Coalition for Social Justice play a greater role and a review takes place not only after 30 years, but in five years' time – and in close connection with the discussions on a 'post-2030 agenda'.

The success of the summit will also depend on whether civil society groups push the issue forward. After the first World Social Summit, they reminded their governments year after year, under the umbrella of the Social Watch network, to honour their Copenhagen Commitments. Since 2001, civil society groups and social movements have used the World Social Forums to draw greater media and political attention to demands for social justice. The initial spark for this came from the NGO Forum '95 in Copenhagen. If the second World Social Summit had a similarly mobilizing effect, it would indeed be a milestone in the struggle for global social rights.

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Further information

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