



Cape Town Declaration on The Role of Business and Civil Society in Advancing Social Justice

Adopted at the 4th International Conference on Social Justice titled “The Role of Business and Civil Society in Advancing Social Justice”.

Hosted by the Centre for Social Justice at Stellenbosch University and the Council of Social Justice Champions on 11 October 2023

We, the participants of the 4th International Conference on Social Justice, gathered at the Artscape Centre and drawn from stakeholders representing government actors, civil society, business, lawyers, academics, and international stakeholders from various continents:

Reaffirm our commitment to our shared humanity as anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Copenhagen Declaration, other international human rights, and social justice instruments together with relevant domestic constitutions.

Believe that social justice regarding the enjoyment of all rights and freedoms is essential for peaceful coexistence and social cohesion.

Further believe that the world has an abundance of resources that are sufficient for all to realise the full extent of their potential under a socially just and conducive environment through multi-sector partnerships involving state, business and civil

society stakeholders, to yield improved quality of life in a society based on human dignity, equality and expanded frontiers of freedom for all without discrimination on any of the grounds in the Constitution, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, among others.

Note with deep concern this conference takes place amid various human tragedies, including war, that the architects of the UN Charter, Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions, among others, thought were never to be experienced by humanity again, believing that an investment in justice, including social justice, through these multilateral cooperation and normative standard setting instruments, would reward humanity with peace and that war and its odious cruelties would be history.

Further concerned that 75 years into the implementation of the UDHR systemic and structural patterns of socio-economic disparities primarily on grounds such as race, gender, age, nationality, and class remain a reality and, in some cases, a worsening reality reflected in hunger, poverty, unemployment, unequal distribution of resources and opportunities as well as lack of parity of esteem and cultures.

Further concerned over growing social fracture reflected in high levels of violence, including Gender Based Violence (GBV) in families and communities, violence, and armed conflict in other parts of the world, which has primarily claimed the lives of children and other vulnerable members of society.

Believe that business and civil society have a role and responsibility to advance social justice and that role has legal, and moral dimensions while being a pragmatic investment in an ecosystem that supports human wellbeing, sustainable environments, and business growth.

Note with appreciation that business and civil society actors have stepped up to play such role by complying with labour and employment laws, corporate regulations and general laws that prohibit exploitation and those that foster remedial justice while

going beyond legal compliance to combat hunger, poverty, and various forms of inequality in areas such as education, health, business ownership, social infrastructure, sports, and arts.

Note that business and civil society have been particularly central in initiatives aimed at assisting vulnerable communities during COVID-19 and other moments of distress and advocacy for human rights on a shared humanity basis.

Are convinced that deepening poverty, hunger, and inequality pose a threat to social cohesion, peace, stability, and the rule of law, while undermining sustainable development and resilient economic growth and there is an urgent need to make meaningful progress in addressing these disparities in line with the SDGs.

Reaffirm our commitment to the resolutions of the Inaugural International Social Justice Conference which took place at the Hazendal Conference Centre in 2019, among them the endorsement of the Musa Plan for Social Justice (Social Justice M-Plan), a Marshall Plan like initiative dedicated to advancing social justice in South Africa; acknowledgement of the threat that social injustice poses to sustainable development, social cohesion, peace and stability; and seizing the catalytic opportunity presented by the SDGs Agenda for Change and the opportunities available for multidisciplinary academic research to catalyse progress towards breaking the back of structural inequality and ending poverty by 2030.

Further reaffirm the link between social justice, human rights and peace and specifically the grounding of social justice in international and regional human rights treaties, such as the UN Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNHR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), African Charter for Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR), Maputo Protocol and subsidiary human rights and social change instruments.

Encouraged and inspired by the concrete social justice commitments and Programme of Action in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of 1995, the SDGs adopted by the UN in 2015 as a universal call to end poverty, advance equality, foster resilient communities, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030, the Continent's Agenda 2063 and the progress the country has made on the social justice imperatives that emerge from these and progressive domestic constitutions.

Affirm that the UDHR and related human rights normative instruments impose a duty on the Government to advance equality with a focus on equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms including the right to equality in all aspects of the economy, and the collective and respective responsibility of all sections of society to advance social justice, particularly regarding social and economic parity while being mindful of the interconnectedness and indivisibility of human rights and freedoms.

Are encouraged by progress made since the Inaugural International Social Justice Conference, including experimental research and development work aimed at ensuring equality conscious law reform and policy design, leveraging disaggregated data for predictive impact of planned policies and laws and exploration of integration of social policy considerations on equity into data science, including AI.

But note that though it is natural that ending poverty and reducing inequality is a progressive enterprise that yields incremental progress, the direction and pace of social change in many societies, which includes the widening gap between the rich and poor and between developed and developing countries, is a major concern.

Are concerned that not enough attention has been paid to the relationship between economic policy design and wellbeing, human development, and environmental justice.

Encouraged that there is a growing acknowledgement in business and broader society that the improvement of the lives of all people, requires a private-public co-sharing

relationship premised on the use of collective resources to achieve a socially just and equitable society.

Further encouraged by emerging partnerships between business, government and society that foster an environment in which business can thrive, advance SDG 10, 1, 2 and 13 and 16.

We thereby resolve to:

1. **Support the adoption of holistic integrated Marshall Plan styled initiatives** such as the Social Justice Musa Plan as a vehicle of collaboration to accelerate the advancement of social justice in all areas of life, including the family, economy, public governance, and parity of social esteem among all social groups, regardless of diversity.
2. **Collaborate in** accelerating progress on SDGs by intentionally drawing business and civil society together in their respective roles and ensuring business and civil society is committed and engaged, particularly with SDG 10 1, and 16.
3. **Scale efforts aimed at advancing social justice** through incorporating design thinking and systems thinking in law reform, policy design as well as the design of services and products in a manner that meets all groups and communities where they are while consciously advancing economic and other forms of equality and working towards ending poverty by 2030 and assisting government, business, and courts to mainstream social justice through impact foresight tools such as the SIAM.
4. **Promote greater fidelity** to human rights normative standards regarding socio-economic inclusion and participatory democracy as well as social accountability through actions that include conducting constitutional literacy, legal literacy, and economic literacy, while promoting greater transparency in government economic policy design processes and enhanced access to justice through courts and other forums.

5. **Collaborate on research** and other measures to strengthen synergy between social justice, economic growth, sustainable, development, democracy, and the rule of law.
6. **Collaborate on** assisting governments to place investment in the youth, women, rural or other marginalised communities in its SMME development, food security, social infrastructure, anti-crime measures and other interventions, particularly in the implementation of the SDG, Covid-Recovery and Just Transition agendas.
7. **Promote the realisation of social justice** through advocacy policy development directed at economic redistribution, land reform, ending corruption, promoting the rule of law, and strengthening democracy.
8. **Collaborate** on social justice research and the design of innovative tools to improve social justice responsiveness of all policy and societal actions.
9. **Initiate** integrated social justice education anchored in legal and human rights literacy plus peace building.
10. **Convene** interdisciplinary, intersectoral and transnational partnerships to work on corruption, and sustainable development and support tripartite collaboration between state, business, and civil society.

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