Globalization is among the most hotly debated issues on political agendas today. The discussion, however, tends to be fragmented, with views often polarized along political or geographic lines. Some blame globalization for exacerbating unemployment and poverty, while others see it as a way of solving such problems. Attention and research focuses mainly on markets and perceived economic gains or losses rather than on what the globalization process means for people and their families.

This lack of consensus makes it harder to develop policies at national and international levels. Moreover, the inadequate thought given to the human side of globalization creates a gap in understanding the forces of change and how people react to them. Such knowledge is necessary if appropriate policy responses are to be developed.

A World Commission

It is against this backdrop that the International Labour Organization in February 2002 launched a World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. This is an independent commission whose aim is to move the debate from confrontation to dialogue, and thereby set the stage for action. It will seek consensus on ways of ensuring that the benefits of globalization reach more people. More specifically, the Commission’s goals are:

- To identify policies linked to globalization that reduce poverty, foster growth and development in open economies and promote decent work.
- To pinpoint ways of making globalization more inclusive, so that the process can be viewed as fair to all, both within and among countries.
- To promote a more focussed international dialogue on the social dimension of globalization.
- To help the international community forge greater policy coherence so that both economic and social goals can be attained globally.

The Commission will prepare an authoritative report after looking at the various facets of globalization, public perceptions about the process and its implications for economic and social progress. It will search for innovative ways of combining economic, social and environmental objectives. And it will seek to build a broad consensus among key actors and stakeholders. To this end, the Commission will hold consultations with representatives of governments, the business world, labour, civil society groups and regional and international organizations.

The Members

The World Commission benefits from the diversity of nationality, background and expertise of its 26 members. It is also the first independent commission to be co-chaired by two sitting Heads of State: Finnish President Tarja Halonen and Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa.
Its other members include politicians, academics, business people, trade unionists and leaders of civil society. They are: Giuliano Amato, Ruth Cardoso, Heba Handoussa, Eveline Herfkens, Ann McLaughlin Korologos, Lu Mai, Deepak Nayyar, Taizo Nishimuro, Valentina Matvienko, François Perigot, Surin Pitsuwan, Julio María Sanguinetti, Hernando de Soto, Joseph Stiglitz, John J. Sweeney, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Aminata D. Traoré, Zwelinzima Vavi and Ernst von Weizsäcker.

ILO Director-General Juan Somavia together with the Officers of the ILO’s Governing Body, Bill Brett, Eui-youg Chung, Daniel Funes de Rioja and Alain Ludovic Tou, are ex-officio members of the Commission.

Commissioner’s BIOs

Co-Chair: H.E. Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland.

Co-Chair: H.E Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, President of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Members:

Giuliano Amato (Italy): Vice-President of the Constitutional Convention of the European Union and former Prime Minister of Italy.

Ruth Cardoso (Brazil): First Lady of Brazil and President of the Comunidade Solidaria Council (Community Solidarity Council).

Heba Handoussa (Egypt): Managing Director of the Economic Research Forum for the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey and member of the Shura Council, Egypt’s Upper House of Parliament.


Ann McLaughlin Korologos (United States): Vice Chairman of the Rand Corporation, Senior Advisor to Benedetto, Gartland and company, an investment banking firm in New York and member of the Board of various corporations.

Lu Mai (China): Secretary-General of the China Development Research Foundation since 1998.

Valentina Matvienko (Russian Federation): Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation with responsibility for social issues, education, sports and culture.

Deepak Nayyar (India): Vice Chancellor of the University of Delhi and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research, Helsinki.

Taizo Nishimuro (Japan): Chairman of the Board of Toshiba Corporation and Vice Chairman of the Japanese Business Federation.
François Perigot (France): President of the International Organization of Employers (IOE) since June 2001. President of MEDEF International, the International Branch of the French Employers’ Association and member of the Board of several French companies.

Surin Pitsuwan (Thailand): Member of Parliament and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, member of the Commission on Human Security and a regular columnist for major newspapers in Thailand and in the region.

Julio Maria Sanguinetti (Uruguay): President of the Circulo de Montevideo and former President of the Republic of Uruguay.

Hernando de Soto (Peru): President of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy and influential author of best-selling books on economic policy.


John J. Sweeney (United States): President of the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (Philippines): The founder and Executive Director of Tebtebba Foundation (Indigenous Peoples’ International Center for Policy Research and Education), and expert and advisor on indigenous people’s and gender issues.

Aminata D. Traoré (Mali): Author and Director of Centre Amadou Hanyrat Ba (CAHBA), one of the organizations of the African Social Forum.

Zwelinzima Vavi (South Africa): General Secretary of Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU).

Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker (Germany): Scientist, member of the German Bundestag and Chairman of the Bundestag Commission on “Globalization of the World Economy: Challenges and Answers”.

Ex officio members:


Juan Somavia (Chile): Director-General of the ILO.


Work Programme

The World Commission began its work in early 2002 and is expected to release its final Report in late 2003.

The Commission will meet every two to three months. To ensure that the Commission’s work is as open and inclusive as possible, there will be a series of consultations with important actors in the globalization process. Some of these “dialogues” will take place during meetings of the Commission, while others will be held at regional or national level, with individual Commission members participating where feasible. Among those to be consulted are governments, business, workers, civil society, international and regional organizations. The dialogues are being planned between July 2002 and early 2003 in the following countries: Bangladesh, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, India, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and the United States.

The Commission will work closely with other multilateral institutions, which have been invited to contribute information and research. The Commission may also request written submissions from other organizations.

The Secretariat of the Commission will collaborate with outside consultants on papers that collect and interpret facts and perceptions relating to the social dimension of globalization. It will also establish knowledge networks involving the authors of these papers as well as other experts, including those in the multilateral system.

The World Commission’s secretariat is at the ILO’s Geneva Headquarters. Its Executive Secretary is Mr. Padmanabha Gopinath, formerly counsellor to the Director-General. Mr. Gerry Rodgers, who heads the ILO’s Policy Integration Department, is responsible for technical support to the Commission.
Frequently Asked Questions

Why establish a World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization?

During the past decade there has been much discussion and controversy over the impact of global economic integration. While increased trade and foreign direct investment have undoubtedly brought benefits, these are unevenly spread, with some countries and segments of the population clearly missing out. New technology, in particular the Internet, has created opportunities for many. But because less-developed countries have little part in this technological revolution, it has aggravated the feeling of a growing gap between the richest and poorest parts of the world. Moreover, 1.2 billion people remain mired in poverty, living on under $1 a day. And others, both in the developed and developing world, have struggled to cope with the changes brought by globalization.

Such inequalities have led some to question global economic integration. Others, however, argue that the way forward involves ensuring that globalization delivers gains to more people in more places. If this is to happen, it is necessary to move away from polemics over globalization itself and towards a better understanding of how the process affects people and their families. In addition, an effort needs to be made to build consensus among different actors at national and international level. The ILO, the only international agency whose members are represented by governments, employers and unions, has a long tradition of seeking shared solutions. It was in this spirit that the ILO’s Governing Body agreed on the creation of a high-level commission to report on the social dimension of globalization.

What is the social dimension of globalization?

When looking at the impact of globalization, the tendency has been to concentrate on economic indicators, tariff levels and flows of trade and investment between countries. But these only tell part of the story. Behind the statistics are working people and their families, for whom globalization brings insecurities as well as opportunities. The unprecedented economic and technological change of recent decades has transformed lives and created new social landscapes. There has been an impact on relationships within families, among workers and between employees and management. The rapid dissemination of information and the growth of a global media industry can affect people’s sense of identity and lead to an erosion of social solidarity and cultural diversity. At the same time, they can spread democratic values and help promote understanding.

As a result, a full picture of globalization includes a range of issues related to the way people live, work and feel about their world. Access to decent work, education, security, democratic rights and a sense of belonging to communities and societies are all part of the social dimension of globalization.
Why the concern about the social dimension of globalization?

There are those who argue that globalization is essentially an economic process and should be allowed to proceed unfettered. This view holds that other policies, such as education, social security and poverty alleviation, have little to do with the globalization process and should be kept separate. Experience has shown, however, that this is not the case. Social infrastructure, including education, health, social welfare and legal and administrative systems, all play key roles in deciding whether countries and their people can take advantage of opportunities provided by globalization. Moreover, the legitimacy of global integration depends on people having a say in the process and also seeing tangible benefits in their everyday lives.

What can a World Commission contribute?

Since the early 1980s, the international community has increasingly turned to independent commissions to consider issues of global concern. These have combined with United Nations world conferences to raise awareness about the environment, development and poverty. While the reports of such commissions do not always translate into specific measures or laws, they can be instrumental in putting hitherto little discussed concepts on to the world stage. The Brundtland Commission, for example, brought to the fore the links between the environment and development, popularising the term “sustainable development” in the process.

Independent commissions can allow for more creative and original thinking than usually occurs when the fine details of laws or conventions are being negotiated. This freedom has produced innovative instruments and institutional devices. And by drawing in a wide variety of players, independent commissions can make linkages that do not always emerge in national and international governance. In this vein, the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization provides a unique opportunity to look at the big picture, pulling together the economic and social strands of globalization at national, regional and international levels. Nonetheless, political will is needed if independent commissions are to realize their full potential, with proposals turned into action.

How does the work of the World Commission relate to the issue of trade and labour standards?

The past two decades have seen considerable debate and controversy over the relationship between trade liberalization and labour standards. In the event, members of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and its successor body, the World Trade Organization, have been unable to resolve their differences on the matter. But an international consensus has emerged on the importance of core labour standards in a globalizing world. The Copenhagen Social Summit in 1995 defined a set of standards that would provide a social floor to the global economy. These four principles – freedom of association and the elimination of child labour, forced labour and discrimination – formed the basis for the adoption of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its follow-up.

In parallel, the ILO is now recognized as the relevant body for setting and administering the standards concerned. Both the WTO Singapore Ministerial Declaration of 1996, in which members renewed their commitment to core labour standards, and the ILO Declaration also
state that these standards should not be used for protectionist purposes. At their meeting in Doha in November 2001, WTO ministers also took note of the ILO’s work on the social dimension of globalization. This is the basis on which the World Commission will examine the role of international trade within the wider context of globalisation.

**How do recent international developments fit into the Commission’s work?**

These developments have further emphasized the growing interdependence of today’s world. The repercussions of September 11 have had an impact on people and countries everywhere. Similarly, few have remained unaffected by the slowdown in growth, corporate scandals and stock market declines. The resulting economic and personal insecurity has added to the sense of vulnerability already felt by many people in the face of external forces that they have little control over. This has made it all the more urgent to develop ideas and policies to help cope with and mitigate the volatility and vulnerability found in our globalizing world, as well as to access the new opportunities it provides.

For more information and questions:

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