

H.E Secretary General's Statement at the Plenary Meeting of the Second World Summit for Social Development, 4-6 November 2025, Doha, Qatar

Theme: "Questions Relating to the World Social Situation and to Youth, Ageing, Persons with Disabilities and the Family"

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is my great honor to address this august gathering on behalf of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
2. Our deep appreciation to the State of Qatar and the United Nations for convening us under such an inspiring and human-centered Summit after 3 decades.
3. South Asia is home to nearly one-fourth of humanity. It is a region of ancient civilizations, youthful energy, and immense potential but not free from social-economic challenges and challenge of climate change. Poverty, inequality, ageing populations, and the exclusion of marginalized groups continue to impede our collective journey toward the goals of sustainable and inclusive development. In this context, the agenda of this Summit resonates deeply with the priorities of SAARC.
4. The shared commitment of our region to inclusive development is guided by the SAARC Charter, which places the welfare of the peoples of South Asia at the very heart of regional cooperation.
5. Our vision is clear: to build a South Asia that is socially just, economically vibrant, and humanly secure.
6. The SAARC Social Charter, adopted in 2004, provides the framework for collaboration in key social sectors from poverty alleviation and women's empowerment, to youth emancipation and social protection. Under this Charter, Member States have continued to exchange experiences and good practices, creating a strong foundation for social policy cooperation.
7. And this cooperation has been producing results. In recent years, extreme poverty has declined, literacy rates have risen, especially among women and girls, and life expectancy has increased. Social safety nets and digital inclusion programs are expanding empowering millions to participate more fully in the life of their communities.

8. These achievements reflect South Asia's enduring belief that economic growth must walk hand in hand with social justice and human dignity.

9. Mr. President, South Asia's greatest strength lies in its youth. Almost half of our population is below the age of twenty-five.

10. Through the SAARC Youth Charter, we are celebrating young leaders who are shaping their communities through innovation, volunteerism, and entrepreneurship. Programmes on skills development, digital literacy, and start-up support are helping young people turn creativity into opportunity. In doing so, we are transforming our demographic dividend into a powerful engine for progress.

11. At the same time, our societies are preparing for a future with larger ageing populations. Equally important is the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Our Member States are aligning national policies with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Within SAARC, we continue to share innovations and best practices to ensure that disability is never a barrier to opportunity or participation.

Excellencies,

12. The social challenges of our time know no borders. They demand collective action and shared solutions. We therefore attach great importance to partnerships with the United Nations system, civil society, and development partners. In this spirit, SAARC continues to align its programs with the SDGs, particularly those on education, gender equality, decent work, and reduced inequalities. We are also leveraging digital cooperation and social innovation to bridge divides and promote inclusion.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. The peoples of South Asia share a common aspiration to live in societies that are inclusive, compassionate, and just.

14. As we deliberate in this Second World Summit, let us not only reaffirm our unwavering commitment, but also take action supported by global partnership to build a world where every person man or women, young or old, able or differently abled, within every family and every society lives with dignity, opportunity, and prosperity.

I thank you.