occasional paper no. 2
world summit for social development

globalization and social integration: patterns and processes

by dharam ghai and cynthia hewitt de alcántara

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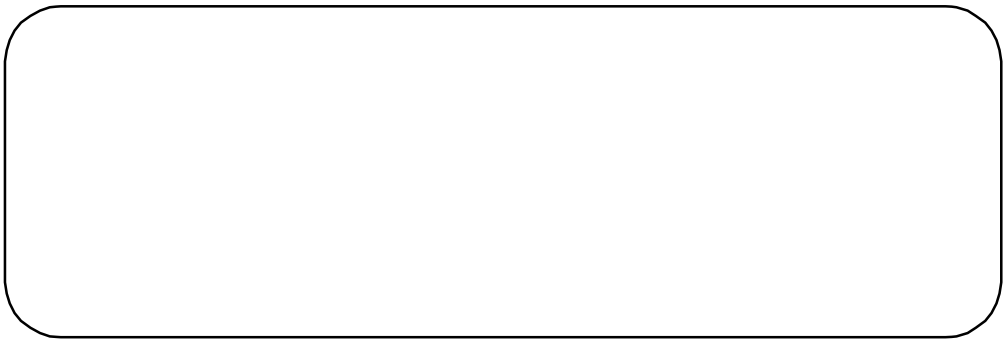

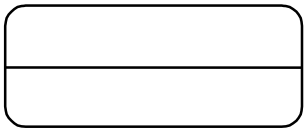

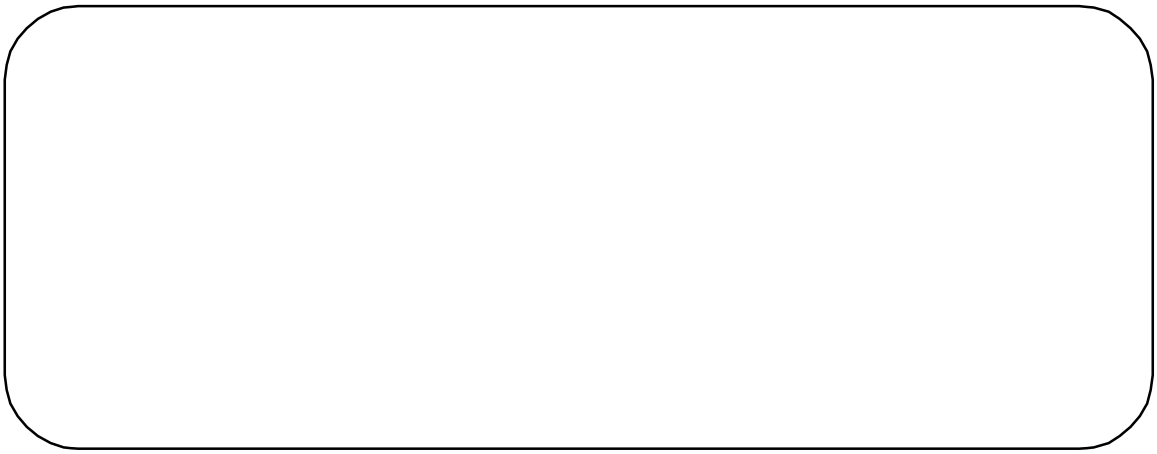

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geneva, july 1994

Preface

The World Summit for Social Development, to be held in Copenhagen in March 1995, provides an important opportunity for the world community to focus its attention on the nature and roots of current social problems and trends. In particular, the agenda of the Summit specifies three areas of concern: the reduction of poverty, the generation of productive employment, and the enhancement of social integration. UNRISD work in preparation for the conference is centred on the last of these. In the face of seemingly intractable problems of violence, institutional breakdown and mass alienation in various parts of the world, the subject of social integration should be carefully explored and debated.

The UNRISD Occasional Paper Series for the Social Summit takes up a range of issues related to social integration and disintegration. This paper provides background for others in the series by considering the relation between certain major processes or forces of global change, on the one hand, and the evolution of values, institutions and patterns of social interaction on the other.

The last two decades have been marked by dramatic political, economic and social developments: the turn toward liberal democracy and the collapse or retreat of communism in a number of countries; accelerated global economic integration and reliance on market forces; rapid technological change and associated modification of production systems and labour markets; the media revolution and expansion of consumer culture. These extraordinary changes have coincided with a period of slow growth, stagnation or economic collapse in most parts of the world, with the outstanding exception of several Asian countries. The result has in many cases been a deepening of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

In the following pages, an attempt is made to explore the implications of these changes for social integration at the level of households, communities and neighbourhoods, and within the network of associations which make up civil society. The implications of globalization for good governance are then considered. Finally, problems of social integration in multi-ethnic societies are discussed in some detail.

In the new age ushered in by global processes, noted above, the world community faces a series of challenges to which there can be no simple or absolute answers. How can the polarizing effects of global markets be controlled without returning to the kind of protectionism which stifles efficiency and growth? How can new bases of solidarity be created during a period when capital is perfectly mobile and labour more mobile than it has ever been before? How can the clash of values and cultures be minimise, and elements of a common culture be constructed, in a world which grows smaller with each passing day? And how can the current trend toward socio-economic and political marginalization of growing numbers of people be reversed?

July 1994

Dharam Ghai
Director

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