President's Welcome Address at the 23rd ICSD Biennial International Conference—Social Development in Times of Crisis: Challenges and Responses, Gavle, Sweden, 23–25 August 2023

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Good morning to all of you!

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge and respect traditional owners of the land globally, whom we call First Nations people, Aboriginal People, Indigenous Peoples, tribals, and their elders, and their land on which we live and thrive.,

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues, esteemed delegates, both online and in this hall, distinguished guests, and fellow advocates for social development.

Prof. Ylva Fältholm—Vice Chancellor, University of Gavle; keynote speakers, Prof. Marianne Takle, Oslo Metropolitan University; Prof. Leila Patel, Distinguished Professor, University of Johannesburg; Dr. George Palattiyil, University of Edinburgh; Prof. Ashok Swain, Uppsala University; Dr. Josefin Westerberg Jacobson—Head of the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Gavle and Chair of the 23rd ICSD Conference Organizing Committee; Prof. Sven Trygged, Chair of the 23rd ICSD Conference Scientific Committee; Prof. Fereshteh Ahmadi, Chair of the 23rd ICSD conference International Advisory Committee and a keynote speaker; and Dr. Komal Singh Rambaree, Associate Prof. of Social Work, University of Gavle, Vice President of ICSD and 23rd ICSD conference coordinator.

It is a real honor and privilege to serve as the president of this unique interdisciplinary professional body, International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD), and in that capacity extend a very warm welcome to all of you to this 23rd biennial international conference of the ICSD, organized by the University of Gavle.

It has taken more than 2 years to prepare for this conference and come together like this. On the initiative of Dr. Komal Singh Rambaree, when we received a proposal from the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Gavle and Municipality of Gavle, to host this 23rd ICSD biennial conference, each member of the ICSD Executive Committee was very impressed with the proposal and wholeheartedly supported it to host the conference by the University of Gavle.

Originally, this conference was scheduled for 21–23 June 2023, but it had to be changed to August to prevent the clash of conference dates with that of another professional body in Europe. This change might have caused inconvenience to some participants, and it might have stopped some delegates' participation in this

23rd ICSD biennial international conference participants, University of Gavle, Sweden.

conference. My sincere apologies to all of them. A lot of colleagues have worked hard to organize this conference. The local organizing committee members, under the leadership of the Dean and the head of the department, Dr. Jacobson; members of the scientific committee and its chair, Prof. Trygged; international advisory committee members and its chair, Prof. Ahmadi; and coordinator of the conference Dr. Komal Singh Rambaree have met several times during these 2 years. Volunteers (in red tea-shirt in the photo) have done a great job. They all have sacrificed their holidays and attended to minute details of organizing this conference, and several times responded to our emails. I would like to thank all of them for taking this huge responsibility and hosting the conference.

In my welcome address, I would like to make three points: First, a few words about the theme of this conference—"Social Development in Times of Crisis: Challenges and Responses"; second, asking bold questions about social development; and third, the relevance of ICSD today.

The theme of this conference

When colleagues at the University of Gavle chose this theme—"Social Development in times of Crisis: Challenges and responses"—for the conference, we were still reeling under the thick shadow of the pandemic. We were all significantly

impacted by the pandemic, some more severely than others. Loss of lives and loss of work and consequent grief and hardship in isolation! It had upended the socio-economic and cultural systems. Hence, it was appropriate and timely to think about the crisis caused by the pandemic and what challenges it poses and what opportunities it presents for social development.

But today, that chosen theme is most appropriate for us to deliberate social development challenges and responses because of four crises. First, the crisis has turned into crises. What are these crises? Of course, the pandemic and its impact are a part of crises. Second is the preventable war between Russia and Ukraine and several conflicts and wars in a few countries in Africa. These wars are also directly and indirectly impacting common peace-loving people globally. Energy and goods and services prices have gone up, and in a way, we are paying for these wars by buying petrol and gas and similar products linked to the war. These wars are perpetuating! Third, environmental crisis; in one part of the continent, we have fires and in another part, we have floods.

> The occurrence of frequent and extreme disasters has prompted the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, to shift the climate change terminology from 'global warming' to 'global boiling'. It would not be an exaggeration to further introduce the phrase, 'global drowning' due to floods. When the two elements occur simultaneously and excessively across different continents, the most impacted by them are human beings and other species in the ecological systems, particularly those who do not have capacity to cope with the consequences of such events. (Pawar, 2023b, p. 241)

The fourth crisis is created by the governance systems: The way the governance systems respond to the crisis and crises can itself result in another crisis (Pawar, 2023a), at least in the short term, instead of reducing the crises. For example, sudden lockdown and harsh implementation by law enforcement agencies, and growing inflation tackled by rising interest rates. Such governance measures can hurt some people and their ability to access basic goods and services. It is important and useful to analyze crises caused by governance systems. So, there is no one crisis, there are crises. Some call them colluding crises, some call them culminating crises, some call them overlapping crises, and some call them simultaneous crises.

Therefore, the theme chosen for this conference and its three tracks—global warming and ecological crisis, health and well-being, building peace and stability—are so apt for us to deliberate during these 3 days and plan for follow-up action. That leads to my second point, asking bold questions in our discussion.

Asking bold questions

It is important to ask bold social development questions. Asking critical and bold questions is the foundation of social development thinking and research.

Sometimes, some bold questions may appear too simple or silly. But it is important to ask them. Often bold questions challenge us, challenge the status quo, open new opportunities, help others think deeply and expand horizons, provide avenues for reflection and innovation, and initiate social change. In *Harvard Business Review*, Hagel III (2021) states:

> ...in the midst of crisis and uncertainty, leaders should ask powerful and inspiring questions. Asking questions well can put you on the path to solving intractable problems and will also help you connect with others and, counterintuitively, to earn their trust.

As social development scholars and thinkers, we must ask bold and big questions. We may not have answers to them today, but we will find them one day.

For example, the way some governance systems are responding to crises need to be questioned and examined. A case in point is how many institutions are responding to high inflation rates. Rising prices is a global problem. Many countries are experiencing double digit inflation. The mean inflation rate of the world was 7.4% (McMahon, 2022). Many European countries are experiencing inflation. In Australia, where I come from, the inflation rate was about 7%. To bring the inflation down, many governments' institutions, generally, Reserve Banks, have quickly increased interest rates in a row. It is important to curb inflation for the good of society. But the means of doing so should be reasonable, fair, and just. But the Australian Reserve Bank stated that to bring the inflation down, unemployment rate needs to go up (Hannam, 2023; Hutchens, 2023). In Australia the unemployment rate was about 3.5%, which was a historic low as it has not seen such a rate in the last 50 years. Many governments have used this blunt monetary policy of increasing interests and causing unemployment to reduce rising prices. In economics and economic modeling, this blunt monetary policy—increasing interest rates to calm markets, creating unemployment and through that reducing prices—may appear rational. However, with a social development framework/thinking, this logic does not make sense. We need to ask bold questions about such policies. Why do our institutions need to create unemployment to reduce inflation? In a society that logic does not make any sense. We want all willing people to work, generate income, live happily, peacefully, and satisfactorily. What happens to unemployed people, their self-esteem, their families and their children, and their mental health? Do Reserve Banks of nation-states take into consideration these human and material costs in their monetary policy decisions? From a social development perspective, in any society, all capable people, including differently disabled, willing to work, should be able to have employment and lead a dignified life within a low inflation market environment. Why cannot our institutions have policies to achieve this?

As an example, I am raising this bold question because, in a way the Nordic region has provided a sound platform for social development thinking and action. The origin of the millennium development goals and the sustainable development

goals may be traced to the Nordic region. In 1995, social development declaration occurred at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, Denmark (6–12 March 1995). It was popularly known as the Copenhagen declaration on social development, which emphasized people-centered development and action to achieve poverty alleviation, productive employment, and social integration (United Nations, 1995). In my view, the Copenhagen social development declaration became the pathway for the millennium and sustainable development goals (Midgley 2017; Midgley and Pawar, 2017; Pawar, 2017). In fact, in many respects, comparatively, Nordic countries are good examples of significant progress toward social development. But it appears that tiny cracks are emerging in this relatively well achieved social development systems in the Nordic region. It is time to think about what are those cracks, why are they emerging, and what can be done to fix them before it becomes too late?

Another example of asking bold questions is about globalization and nationalism. You may recall that when globalization, liberalization, and free markets were emerging a few decades ago, some people embraced the process of globalization and some critiqued and resisted it as some thought that it would impact local communities and institutions. There was a significant push against national protection measures. Beyond pros and cons of globalization, there was a tendency to support globalization "as long as I benefit from it, or I benefit more from it." But if someone else benefits from globalization, then there was no support for globalization. Nonetheless, some viewed globalization with optimism. They thought that globalization accompanied by the revolution in information, communication, and digital technology will make the whole world a small village. National borders will be weak, and state of the nation-states may gradually diminish as people and resources can move across the national borders with minimum restraint. This kind of global outlook seems to be promising. Treating the whole world as one family seems to be a good approach. Globalization should not be just restricted to trade and commerce. We need to think about the globalization of welfare, globalization of health, and globalization of delivering basic benefits to everyone who needs it. Why cannot globalization achieve these?

Shifting resources, exploiting cheap labor, making more profits, facilitating closures and causing unemployment, and favoring some regions/countries against others should not be the purpose of globalization. In some respects, advertently or inadvertently, globalization has been weaponized to achieve such purposes. Consequently, nationalism and nationhood appears to be remerging and or have already remerged.

I am pointing out this kind of globalization phenomenon because it leads to a bold and bare question about nationalism or nationhood. There seems to be growing insecurity in some nation-states and nations. This national insecurity is reflected in explicit or implicit policies of nationalism, nativism, welfare chauvinism, and populism. One terrible consequence of these trends is inhumane treatment of refugees and migrants, which most of us are witnessing. So, the question is, has globalization led to nationalism? If so, what is this nation, nationalism,

and nationhood? What is nation-state building? How do national borders matter? What is its purpose? Are these nations supposed to be cooperative, competitive, or have an understanding of sharing and living peacefully. Did they do so during the pandemic? Are these nation-states meant to live in conflict and cause harm to other nation-states? This is because in the process of nation-building a lot of harm can be caused. That leads me to the theory of dominance. Whether the purpose of the nation-state or a group of nations is to dominate others? Is dominance or desire to dominate a factor in nation building? This is because people can be dominated and discriminated in various forms. Domination can occur through nationalism, racism, wealth, economic levels, and deprivation. Domination can also occur through colonization, neo colonization, market, and exploitation. That is why we need to question the purpose of nationalism. Is it to compete with others or dominate others? What is the purpose of competition and domination? This is because war is not only occurring between Russia and Ukraine. Conflicts and wars are also occurring between a few countries in Africa and tensions are building up in Asia and the Pacific. This shows the dynamics of competition and domination by nation-states. That is why we need to question the purpose of nationalism, building nation-states, and the purpose of globalization. This conference provides opportunities to raise and discuss such bold social development questions—our quest for creating universal well-being. I hope you will contribute to these serious and meaningful deliberations.

Now, I will turn to the third point of my welcome address, ICSD.

The relevance of ICSD

I am pleased to share a recent professional experience that has helped me further reinforce the relevance of ICSD for social development scholars. For my research project on social development, I invited four economists to participate. Two of them declined and the remaining did not reply. My reflection on this experience suggested that although we encourage interdisciplinary cooperative and collaborative work, often it is difficult to break through professional boundaries. I am not sure whether and how other disciplinary platforms/professional bodies are open to us. For practitioners, researchers, and educators with social work, social welfare, human services, and similar professions interested in social development, the International Consortium for Social Development is the only platform/professional body at the international level with a global outlook. It is open to multidisciplinary scholars. There may be similar professional groups, but their scope is limited at the national level (for example, Macro Practice group in the United States) and or limited to a narrow area of practice such as policy, drug addiction, or community. Similarly, there is an Indonesian Association for Social Development. For my professional practice and scholarly engagement, I found the ICSD platform so relevant. I wondered, if it was not there, where would I go? That question may be relevant to many professionals and scholars like me. This recent experience and reflection on it reinforced in me the relevance and significance of ICSD.

The mission of the ICSD is to build and spread knowledge of social development to eradicate poverty, improve standards of living, and promote human equality and ecological sustainability. "We want to be a leading association of international scholars and practitioners devoted to the study and advancement of knowledge and practice about social development" (ICSD, 2021). Your scholarship, participation, and deliberations in this conference contribute toward achieving the mission and vision of the ICSD. The strength of any organization depends upon its members. So, I invite you to take membership of the ICSD. Both individual and institutional membership options are available. To do so, please visit here Membership (socialdevelopment.net). ICSD membership comes with several tangible and intangible benefits to flourish in your scholarship and professional practice. This year, ICSD has introduced the ICSD best student award to be conferred at institutional member institutions. Several institutional members have expressed interest in participating in this award. I encourage other institutions to join them by taking the institutional membership of the ICSD.

We are so excited that next year we will celebrate ICSD's 50th anniversary. The ICSD has been in existence for nearly 50 years. Think about its founders and their vision. They established ICSD 49 years ago. They were great visionaries. Most of them came from developing countries, had experience of working for United nations, and taught in the United States. My special tribute to the founders and other colleagues who have contributed to building this professional body for over 49 years. As part of the ICSD 50th anniversary celebrations, under the leadership of Prof. Brij Mohan and Prof. Philip Hong, Editor and Associate Editor, respectively, of *Social Development Issues*, we have planned a 50th anniversary special issue of the *Social Development Issues*, a flagship journal of the ICSD. In addition, another special issue also is planned to honor Prof. Shanti Khinduka to recognize his contributions to the field of social development and ICSD. For details of these special issues (ICSD, 2023), please visit page 6 of the ICSD Newsletter (ICSD Newsletter_ June 2023.pdf - Google Drive). I invite you to contribute to these special issues.

As you know, this is the 23rd ICSD biennial conference taking place in Gavle. ICSD has organized these conferences in different countries and continents. Of these 23 conferences, I was fortunate to participate in 9 of them. I began attending these conferences since 2003–2004. I have attended the ICSD biennial conference in India, Brazil, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Singapore, Croatia, Indonesia, and South Africa (online). For the 9th we are here in Sweden. Each conference provided a unique experience to me, and I have significantly gained from social development scholars' work, their presentations and professional exchanges and networks, and professionally prospered. I am sure this conference will offer gains for all of us.

It will give me immense joy to witness this conference and deliberations that are going to occur on these 3 days. In this conference, while discussing the three themes—global warming and ecological crisis, health and well-being, and building peace and stability—we represent diversity. We bring in different cultures, different values, and different scholarly perspectives. But what binds us together

is our common pursuit of social development. We are committed to achieving universal well-being and that is our bold and big question. It is through this collaborative effort and collaborative intellectual sharing that we can make a lasting impact. We all social development advocates together can build a brighter future for everyone, for generations to come.

Once again, a warm welcome to everyone.

Thank you.
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President, ICSD

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