

General debate: "Parliamentary Action for Social Development and Justice"

President/chairperson, dear colleagues,

Something is not working. Young people, in particular, are growing up with the sense that no matter how hard they work, the system isn't built for them. That it's harder to get by, harder to be heard, and harder to see a future where things actually get better.

Across the world we're seeing rising inequality, climate anxiety, and communities that feel ignored and unheard. As a young parliamentarian, this is of great concern to me. When I see my own and the younger generation losing trust in systems that are set up to help and empower them. When they see examples of economic development that is not benefiting them, but rather is concentrating wealth in fewer hands, rewarding those who already have advantages, and leaving the rest to navigate growing insecurity.

So what do we do about it?

Before I became an elected official, I remember being one of the young people who got to participate and have my voice heard as the SDGs were developed. I remember all the hope for the future that the process came with. And I remain hopeful, even though we are still far off.

When we as politicians set ourselves goals, we should also strive to achieve them. And I do believe that you want that as well.

But people are tired of being told to wait. Young people are tired of being told to be patient, to adjust, to accept that the system isn't perfect but it's the best we've got.

Firstly: economic development has to be about people, not just numbers on a spreadsheet. For too long, we've measured success by growth rates alone. But that doesn't tell us if someone can afford rent. It doesn't tell us if young people are burning out in school or stuck in jobs that don't pay enough to live.

A new social contract needs multiple measures of progress—ones that reflect wellbeing, equality, and sustainability. Because if growth comes at the cost of the climate, of peoples fundamental rights — then it's not really growth in the broad sense of the word. It's development at the cost of people.

Second, we need to push for global reforms that promote justice. That means holding multinational companies accountable across borders. It means fairer trade rules, climate financing that actually reaches vulnerable communities, and development aid that listens to the people it's supposed to support and empower.

But global justice starts at each of our homes. And if we're serious about social development, we need to talk about inclusion—not just in theory, but in practice.

And we have to be honest: True social development is impossible without equality. Impossible when parts of our populations do not have the same opportunities. When women or minorities, such as LGBTI individuals, are being discriminated against, it does not benefit anyone but those who stands to gain from oppressing others.

Around the world, women are still paid less, underrepresented in leadership, and disproportionately impacted by poverty and violence. That needs to change. We need to invest in reproductive health, support women's economic independence, and ensure that policies—from education to climate action—are shaped with women's voices at the center. If we want real progress, we can't afford to leave half the population behind.

Too many young people, too many people from minority backgrounds, LGBTI individuals, people with disabilities, or those growing up in poverty—still don't have the same access to opportunities. They're facing barriers in education, in the job market, in housing, in health care. That's not just unfair—it's a waste of talent, energy, and potential.

We talk a lot about giving people a seat at the table. But it's not enough to offer a chair—you have to make space for their voice, their reality, their power. Inclusion means co-creation. It means investing in schools where every kid can succeed, not just those who already start ahead. It means making sure mental health care is there when someone needs it, not six months later.

And it means trusting young people—not just in words, but by actually giving them influence. I've met so many young Norwegians who care deeply about climate, about social justice, about building a fairer society. But they don't see politics as a place where they belong. That should worry all of us. If politics doesn't represent young people, it's not representing the future.

So, what does this mean for us?

It means we need to be bold. We need to build policies that are rooted in fairness, dignity, and possibility. We need to challenge systems that protect the status quo and embrace solutions that lift up the most vulnerable.

Because social development isn't a luxury. It's not something we can get to after the economy is "fixed." It *is* the fix. A more inclusive society is a stronger society. A more just and equal society is a safer one. And a country that takes care of all its people—especially the ones who've had the least—is a country that moves forward together.

So let's act with that in mind.

That's what social justice looks like. That's what progress looks like.