

14 January 2000

United Nations Seminar
Centre de Conférences Internationales
23 rue la Pérouse
75775 Paris Cedex 16

19-21 January 2000



Introductory Note

1. The Seminar on Values and Market Economies is organised in the context of the preparation of the Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations which will be convened in Geneva on 26-30 June 2000 to review the implementation of the decisions taken by the World Summit for Social Development in March 1995 in Copenhagen. These decisions, presented in the form of ten commitments and their related policies, include in particular the eradication of poverty as an ethical imperative, full employment as a basic priority of economic and social policies, and the promotion of social integration in stable, safe and just societies. At the same time, the Social Summit re-emphasised the notion of sustainable development, the objective of equality between women and men, and stated that societies must respond more effectively to the material and spiritual needs of individuals, their families, and the communities in which they live.

2. Since the Social Summit, the basic principles and modern features of the market economy system have continued to gain wide acceptance throughout the world, and there has been a parallel globalisation of the world economy through the liberalisation of financial transactions and the use of much enhanced techniques of communications. Market economies differ greatly in their characteristics and performance, and there are notable exceptions of States having kept a strong direct economic role. Overall, however, the private sector has acquired considerable influence on world affairs. And other actors in the functioning of market economies, for example in some cases consumer's movements, have also more power, while still other actors, notably the trade-unions, are trying to adjust to changed and often adverse circumstances. Greater power implies greater responsibility. Market economies are social constructs and their main actors are both creators of norms and values and most important disseminators of the values embedded in societies and the world community.

3. The question to be addressed by this Seminar will be the contribution that market economies are making to the realisation of the values proclaimed by the Social Summit. The perspective will be normative, by the nature of the subject, and because the assessment of current facts and tendencies will not be separated from ideas on possible improvements. The hope of the Secretariat of the United Nations is that such ideas will be considered by the General Assembly in June 2000. The perspective will be global, because the United Nations is concerned with the common good of humanity, and because the globalised part of the world economy, built essentially according to the tenets of the

respect for norms and conventions setting the relationships between capital and labour. Among the questions of particular relevance to the Seminar will be the adequacy of the current concepts and institutions to enhance a democratic and meaningful cooperation at the international level between the main actors, beneficiaries, and also victims and "excluded" of the global market economy. From a United Nations perspective, differences in economic and political power have to be reconciled with the necessity to ensure that all concerned, nations and groups, have a voice in the implementation of the values shared by the international community.

8. The Seminar will bring together about twenty five participants from different regions, traditions and experience, invited in their personal capacity. Debates will be informal and the Seminar will be organised to render possible a maximum level of exchanges of views. The Chairman will act as a moderator of the discussion. Each participant might be requested, in advance, to make a five minutes presentation on one of the themes of the Seminar. The working languages will be English and French. Besides a detailed annotated agenda, a few background documents will probably be made available to the participants. A report, prepared under the responsibility of the United Nations, will be included in the documentation for the review of the implementation of the provisions of the Social Summit in June 2000.



Fundação Cuidar o Futuro