



INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DE LA SÉCURITÉ SOCIALE
ASOCIACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE LA SEGURIDAD SOCIAL
INTERNATIONALE VEREINIGUNG FÜR SOZIALE SICHERHEIT

**Regional Social Security Forum for Europe
Opening Address of Corazon de la Paz-Bernardo
President of the International Social Security Association
Warsaw, 3 March 2010**

Your Excellency, Madame Jolanta Fedak, Minister of Labour and Social Policy,

Mr. Zbigniew Derdziuk, President of the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS),

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a privilege for me to be here today and to welcome you all on this historic occasion, the first Regional Social Security Forum being organized by the International Social Security Association in Europe. The impressive attendance at this event is clear proof that social security and the challenges confronting it are at the forefront of priorities in this region, which is a most auspicious beginning to this Forum.

Your Excellency, Madame Minister,

May I say at the outset that we are very honored by your presence at this inaugural ceremony. Through this very significant gesture, you have demonstrated to ISSA member organizations throughout the region the importance that the Government of Poland places on the development of social security for the protection of the entire population of your country.

Your Excellency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to express, on behalf of the International Social Security Association, our sincerest gratitude to you and to your government for having generously agreed to host this event in Warsaw. And our very special congratulations and thanks to the Polish Social Insurance Institute and all the members of the National Organizing Committee for organizing this first Regional Social Security Forum for Europe. It is a powerful symbol indeed that we meet here in Warsaw, close to the geographic centre of Europe, and in a part of the region that has seen so much change in the last two decades.

This Regional Social Security Forum has a very special significance for the ISSA since it is the first of this new model of events to be held in Europe. Previous Regional Forums were held in Kigali, Rwanda for the region of Africa in 2008, and in Manila, the Philippines for the region of Asia and the Pacific in 2009.

The format of Regional Forums replicates at the regional level the World Social Security Forum, which is organized once in every three years and brings together representatives from the Association's world wide membership. Many of you will recall that the first World Social Security Forum held in Moscow in 2007 was attended by over 1,000 delegates from 126 countries who met in the Russian Federation to discuss a wide range of global social security challenges and the

dynamic ways in which social security institutions were providing an effective response. Mark your calendars: our next World Social Security Forum *rendez-vous* is 2010 in Cape Town, from 29 November to 4 December 2010.

Importantly, the ISSA's world wide membership underlined that there was a need for a similar type of meeting at the regional level, which would provide a platform to examine the most urgent specific concerns being faced by social security schemes both nationally and regionally. In response to this request, Mr. Hans-Horst Konkolewsky and his Secretariat developed this new type of meeting, a Regional Social Security Forum, which focuses on those topics which administrators and directors on each continent selected as the priority areas for their region.

Our agenda is made up of challenges that are at the crux of achieving dynamic social security in a very diverse region. As a framework for the discussions during the next three days a report on **social security developments and trends in Europe** will be presented. Through an analysis of what has been happening in the field of social security in this region, the ISSA Secretary General will share with you the most pertinent issues which have been identified, and will highlight how schemes in Europe have responded to new demands and challenges facing the region. This session will therefore provide the general context for this Forum.

Demographic changes are having a significant impact on social security in Europe: birth rates are low, family structures are evolving and people are living longer. These changes will imply a need for further adjustments and reforms to respond to increased demands, and will be at the centre of our first session.

Subsequently, we will concentrate on the impact of economic globalization and the financial and economic crisis on **labour markets** and the importance of developing new and coherent strategies to mitigate rising unemployment throughout the region.

We will then debate a key issue for all social security institutions: the centrality of **good governance of social security institutions** to cope with new public and policy demands in a changing social and economic environment.

Finally, this Forum will close with the first European **social security summit** at which policy-makers and international organizations will debate the key role of social security in facing future socio-economic challenges in this region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your participation at this Regional Forum underlines that you share our view that social security is needed now more than ever in this region, which is the cradle of social insurance. The recent economic and financial crisis, and its impact on the lives of people, is a testimony to the importance of social security for peoples' lives.

I am confident that forward-looking social security administrations in this region can, in this challenging context, continue to innovate and develop a responsive, proactive social security, and thereby contribute to achieving social and economic progress in Europe.

My confidence stems from various reports of the ISSA that show that many social security institutions have introduced diverse, creative and interesting new approaches to social security administration and operations. The Good Practice Award results, which you will learn about tonight, attest to the vitality of our institutions throughout the region.

The International Social Security Association is ready to support you in your important tasks. It was over 80 years ago that the ISSA took root in Europe – with a very important role played by the International Labour Office – with the goal of helping its members to make administrative improvements to their social security schemes. Today the ISSA has over 340 member organizations in 150 countries around the world. In Europe, the ISSA has 142 members representing 43 countries and we are very pleased to welcome to this Forum our member organizations from 26 countries.

The ISSA has a strong tradition of collaboration, knowledge production and sharing, and its activities have evolved during the decades to respond to the changing needs of its members. Today we are constantly, through the work of the Technical Commissions, the Regional Networks, the Social Security Observatory, and the Special Task force on the Extension of Coverage developing our collective knowledge on social security administration.

I find it particularly encouraging to note that European social security institutions continue to highly value the platforms to collaborate and share knowledge that the ISSA is offering. We are very pleased that over 70 per cent of ISSA member organizations in Europe have already designated a member of the newly created ISSA European Network. Active participation in the European Network provides all of us with great benefits and additional opportunities to meet and learn from each other, and I would like to take this occasion to congratulate and thank the members of the Steering Committee of the Network for their commitment and work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This first European Regional Social Security Forum will provide invaluable opportunities for interaction, exchange and sharing – of information, experiences, new challenges and new thinking - amongst governments, social security administrations and other stakeholders on ways towards Dynamic Social Security in Europe.

It will also be an occasion to send the clear message to decision-makers in this region that social security is essential to economic and social progress.

I sincerely hope that in three days you will return to your countries with new ideas and new encouragement to strive towards excellence in social security administration.

Let me conclude by wishing us all the very best of success for this Regional Social Security Forum and by thanking the Polish government and the Social Insurance Institution once again for inviting the European ISSA member institutions to this unique event.