

**OPENING CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN  
YEAR FOR COMBATING POVERTY AND SOCIAL  
EXCLUSION**

Madrid, 21 January 2010

Good morning, everyone,

President of the Spanish Government,

President of the European Commission,

Felipe González, President of the Reflection Group  
on the Future of Europe,

Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and  
Equal Opportunities,

Ministers, Spanish and European Authorities,

Representatives of social organizations and of the  
business sector,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you to Madrid and,  
especially, to the Ministry of Health and Social Policy,

where today we have the honour to host the Opening Conference of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

First of all, I would like to convey my satisfaction, since this event coincides with the beginning of the Spanish Presidency of the European Union. For most of the objectives of the European Year not only fit in with our programme priorities, but also with the principles inspiring the Spanish Presidency.

On the one hand, I refer to innovation, not only technological but also economic, institutional and political, which shall lead us to creating more and better jobs and to deepening the European social model and, on the other hand, to equality in its different spheres, from the standpoint of solidarity, aid for development, and between men and women.

The Europe we are imagining is an innovative and advanced Europe, ready to face future challenges and whose essential value is equality in welfare and opportunities.

Therefore, in the field of social policy, the Spanish Presidency will lay emphasis on the most vulnerable groups, persons with disabilities, older persons and ethnic minorities at greater risk of social exclusion, particularly the Roma population.

In fact, we will devote several specific ministerial meetings to these groups throughout this semester, with a view to promote the active inclusion of the persons who find it more difficult to enter the labour market, also paying special attention to monitoring social determinants of health and reducing inequalities.

It is true that today, some European citizens are still at risk of poverty, persons who cannot access employment, school, hospitals or decent housing.

It is also true that the economic crisis we are going through heightens their precarious situation and vulnerability.

But it is true, as well, that Europe has a recognised model, with strong institutions and specific tools enabling us to meet this challenge.

Moreover, we have the adequate political context for its implementation, since the future European political and economic cycle to be launched with the Strategy 20-20 is being developed in this moment.

But, above all, Europe has the political will to give a social, citizen, joint response, both to global crisis and to structural problems which are at the origin of poverty situations.

What do we lack?

First, we need to better understand the process of exclusion in Europe within a context of fast social and demographic changes;

We need to deepen the social measures implemented by strengthening the existing open method of coordination, and providing it with

indicators to show us the effectiveness of our policies;

And we need to involve the whole society in an equal project for all citizens, from any country or of any age.

These are the commitments of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion beginning today.

In particular, by designating this European Year, we expect to achieve four key objectives:

- 1) Heightening and advancing the recognition of the social rights of these persons,
- 2) Promoting coordination among all sectors, whether public or private, for the social integration of all persons,
- 3) Increasing social cohesion in all countries, and

#### 4) Renewing European and national commitments to social integration policies.

2010 is a good year to renew our commitments, set ambitious targets for the next decade and allocate the necessary resources.

In the first place, the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty gives us a unique opportunity to make the Union more effective and relevant to European citizens, a unique opportunity to boost the European project with which most citizens identify: a more united, more prosperous, fairer and safer Europe.

In the second place, as I said, a reflection on the Strategy 20-20 is being carried out in the European Union in this moment, which shall lay the foundations for the kind of economy we want for the next ten years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have gathered here today as the main and most diverse European society stakeholders involved in combating poverty and social exclusion.

Our common mission, the objective shared by us all, is to continue to progress in the European social model in order to ensure a higher quality of life for all persons, as well as to contribute to build a new productive and social order, a new order to promote sustainable growth, stable and quality employment, based on education, knowledge and innovation, and environmentally friendly. For the best way to prevent situations of vulnerability which may lead to poverty is to strengthen the European social model, built on the principles of equity and solidarity.

I encourage you to take this opportunity to start a solid reflection, a serious debate, a fruitful exchange of opinions and experiences, which enables us throughout this year 2010 to find, together, a common response to this challenge we face, which enables us, as the motto of this event says: building together a society for all persons.

Thank you very much.