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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world

Statement submitted by Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, a non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, addresses the causes and effects of poverty and its consequent human rights violations, and disempowerment of women, girls, children and local communities on a daily basis. It is our experience that when people are at the centre of their own development they can and do move out of poverty to enjoy quality life and well-being.

We welcome the priority theme for this 54th Session of the Commission for Social Development “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world.” The 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development were an insightful but neglected guide with regard to social development. The Declaration and Programme of Action unequivocally placed people at the centre of development, focusing on poverty eradication, full employment and decent work and social integration. The Declaration recognized ‘for the first time in history’ the significance of social development and human well-being for all. Heads of State and Government pledged to give these goals the highest priority.

There are very striking similarities between the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and the recently adopted goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A parallel reading of both documents elaborates the aspiration for social development with ‘people at the center of development’ and pledges ‘to leave no one behind.’ The commitments of Copenhagen and Agenda 2030 echo each other. Commitment 2(b), for example, commits to ‘Focus efforts to address the root causes of poverty and to provide for the basic needs of all (Goal 1). These efforts should include the elimination of hunger and malnutrition (Goal 2); the provision of food security (Goal 2); education (Goal 4); employment and livelihood (Goal 8); primary health-care services including reproductive health care (Goal 3); safe drinking water and sanitation (Goal 6); and adequate shelter; and participation in social and cultural life. Special priority will be given to the needs and rights of women (Goal 5) and children, who often bear the greatest burden of poverty, and to the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and persons.’ Similarly, commitment 6(r) commits to ‘promote environmental awareness (Goal 13) including awareness of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production (Goal 12).’

The chosen priority theme is an acknowledgement that implementation of the commitments to social development is weak. The challenges to sustainable development enumerated in Article 14 of the 2030 Agenda are root causes of and consequences of a weak social pillar — poverty, rising inequalities, enormous disparities of opportunity, wealth and power, gender inequality, unemployment — natural disasters, spiralling conflicts and humanitarian crises. These challenges are cyclical in nature and have a devastating effect on people, giving rise to increased poverty, displacement and social unrest, to the point of threatening all progress made in social development in the last two decades. Further, people living in poverty are very vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Our organization identifies that social development cannot be strengthened while current models of economic growth, production and consumption prevail, using private investment and relying on the logic of profit maximization and competition. It is necessary to develop new paradigms and to embrace structural and systemic reform. Pope Francis recently stated that a misplaced faith in economic structures, market efficiencies, profit and growth, and technological solutions without accountability to the people and the environment has created the unsustainable situation that the world is in today. The Pope called into question models of development, production and consumption and proposes that comprehensive solutions demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and protecting nature (Laudato Si, Paragraph 139).

In their book, 'People First, An Overview of the Key Problems of the Globalized World through Ethics for Development,' Amartya Sen and Bernardo Kilkberg write that 'an ethical agenda is needed for the economy in order to confront morally unacceptable contradictions which destroy social cohesion, social inclusion, equity, access to culture, and to education, harmonious coexistence with nature and political participation.' This same desire is expressed in the Summary of the E-dialogue on Rethinking and Strengthening Social Development in the Contemporary World, 6-24 April, 2015 where social justice is named as an important principle for achieving people-centred inclusive development. The World Social Forum's assessment of the impact of the international economic system on social development and social justice, is that social justice is not being achieved. 'Coherence between social and economic policies remains elusive in part because of the growing influence of powerful, and often unaccountable, private interests in development.' There is a need for people-centred socioeconomic policies to alleviate inequality, reform public services and pensions, create good jobs and better labour conditions, address low living standards, enact land reform, and secure the human rights to food, water, energy, transportation and housing, among others. Social justice should be at the core of every effort and a strong focus should be put into tackling the root causes of poverty and inequality.

Two examples from projects initiated within our organization demonstrate the change that people can effect in their own lives and communities and illustrate ethically-led partnerships towards social justice: A new documentary film, Maisha: A New Life Outside the Mines, offers a rare, up-close look into the harsh — and even lethal — world of artisanal copper and cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This mining is the first rung of the global supply chain of "digital minerals" that is trapping millions in poverty. The documentary calls attention to the exploitation and appalling working conditions of the miners. The filmmakers also reveal the story of a powerful grassroots project run by the Good Shepherd Sisters that has emerged from the midst of this poverty, one that trains ex-miners to build businesses and puts former child miners in classrooms. The film shares a hopeful message showing how an impoverished Congolese community is beating the odds to build a better, more sustainable tomorrow, and in turn laying waste to the cycle of poverty, exploitation and abuse that traps so many. The project is based on four principles: developing a self-sustaining community including food security, increasing child protection, decreasing the incidence of gender-based discrimination by promoting human rights, and strengthening community cohesion.

The second project is a new development within the already successful 'No Interest Lending Scheme developed by Good Shepherd Microfinance in partnership

with the Australian Government and banks. Good Shepherd Microfinance offers loans and other people-centred financial programs to people on low incomes at 650 locations across Australia. People are enabled to define and then realize their own economic well-being and feel valued and in control of their finances and lives. The new development, to be launched in early 2016, is an insurance scheme that permits people flexibility in what to insure and in how to pay. It is Australia's first insurance product for people on low incomes. In their May 2015 Budget, the Australian Government made a commitment to develop the country's first Financial Inclusion Action Plan programme. 'Essentials by AAI', developed by Good Shepherd Microfinance and Suncorp, showcases what can be achieved when community-based organizations and an ethical corporate sector work together in collaboration with governments. These partnerships are based on inclusion, respect and shared commitment to justice and equality.

Recommendations to all Member States:

- Launch the ambitious, forward-thinking and sustainable policies that challenge current models and policies of economic development, trade agreements, land grabbing, extractivism etc. and engage with models of economic development that democratize ownership of resources and economic gains, and promote solidarity-based forms of ownership and management.
- Challenge economic partnership agreements that propose a global legal framework that strengthens corporate rights over people's rights and the environment.
- Reorient the economy towards promoting the well-being of people and the planet instead of growth in profits. Ensure that economic actors and their activities are bound by human rights norms and principles; by adopting an ecosystems framework for social planning; and by fostering the values and culture of caring and solidarity for people and planet.
- Stop militarization and war. Progressively reduce military spending to promote sustainable development, social justice and lasting peace.
- Implement nationally-designed social protection floors according to International Labour Organization Recommendation 202.