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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 May 2011]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Extreme poverty and human rights: In which direction?

The members of the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23) share life and/or are in contact daily with persons living in extreme poverty in many countries of the world, especially in Sub-Sahara Africa, Asia and Latin America. They witness continuously how extreme poverty is both the cause and consequence of multiple human rights violation.

We belong to a world where three billion people live still in poverty and one billion in extreme poverty. These persons have chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights. They are socially excluded.

On the other hand, there are enough resources in the world to satisfy the basic needs of every human being but not to satisfy the greed.

Extreme poverty is not a mere fatality but a scandalous tragedy that reveals the incapability of the human race to live as a human family and for the countries of the world to promote the realisation of the common good.

Extreme poverty is a complex, multidimensional and global phenomenon: while the great majority of the persons living in extreme poverty are in developing and least developing countries, there is no country without people experiencing such a condition.

The recent natural catastrophes have shown how nature does not respect national borders or historical evolution of countries. Persons of a rich and developed country can find themselves suddenly deprived of everything in the same way as persons living in a poor and developing country.

The global economic and financial crisis which surely impacts the developing countries more severely, does not spare the developed ones. Thousands of jobs have been lost and cuts in social protection spending by governments have pushed many persons in the developed world to the level of bare survival.

Limiting geographically extreme poverty would automatically entail the exclusion of the poor from the rest of the world and denying the universality of it would lead to the use of double standards in addressing the rights of persons living in poverty, and equitable development.

Extreme poverty is a complex phenomenon. Its proximate and root causes are a combination of different factors: geographical, historical, individual and collective choices, lack of education, unfair land distribution, national and international policies, unregulated market economy, transnational corporations and financial institutions activities, asymmetries of power among nations, attached conditionalities, consumerism culture, international crime organisations (trafficking of military weapons and illicit drugs), natural disasters, heavy debt burden for Least Developing Countries (LDCs), conflicts and wars, epidemics, etc. etc.

Extreme poverty is a global challenge that requires global partnership in order to be defeated. Moreover, at the Millennium Summit, Heads of State and Government stated that global challenges must be managed in a way that distributes costs and burdens fairly, in accordance with basic principles of equity and social justice, and that those who suffer, or who benefit least, deserve help from those who benefit most.

At the High-level plenary meeting of the 65th General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Heads of States, while expressing deep concern that the progresses made since 2005 fall short of what is needed, reaffirmed their commitments to achieve the MDGs, among them the MDG1 to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, by

the year 2015. They acknowledged the threat posed by the multiple global crisis (food, economic and financial, climate change) which have increase vulnerabilities and inequalities and adversely affected development gains, but, nevertheless, they reiterated that this will not deter their efforts to make the MDGs a reality for all.

This renewal of commitments is very good but runs the risk of being judged to be empty rhetoric when one considers the fact that, up to now, only few countries in the world have fulfilled the promise of giving 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) to achieve MDGs. Moreover, the outcome document of the Summit entitled “Keeping the promises” still reflects the disconnection between human rights and MDGs agendas and fails to recognise the operational value of a human rights-based approach to fight extreme poverty and achieve MDGs.

We are very much convinced that the rationale for poverty reduction or eradication and for the achievements of MDGs as a first step towards it, no longer derives merely from the fact that the persons living in extreme poverty have needs but also from the facts that they have rights-entitlements that give rise to legal obligations on the part of others.

We are also convinced that all human rights, being universal and inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, need to be respected, fulfilled and protected.

It is time to try to make this true not only for the political and civil rights but also for the economic, social and cultural rights and even if, these last set of rights, according to international law, should be implemented progressively, the speed of implementation should be expeditious.

We need to shift the paradigm and put a human rights-based approach as a driving force to eradicate extreme poverty.

The Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, being particularly concerned with the advocacy to eradicate poverty and establish global justice, focuses, among others, on the issue of the Draft Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and human rights.

In fact, the Draft Guiding Principles (DGPs), will be a key instrument for the promotion of a human rights-based approach since it recognise that extreme poverty and exclusion from society constitute a violation of human dignity and strengthen the normative human rights basis of poverty eradication measures.

The Association welcome also the fact that the Independent Expert on the question of extreme poverty and human rights, Ms. Magdalena Sepulveda Carmona, recalls, in her last report, the principle of universality of extreme poverty and the numerous binding obligations and political commitments which underline the shared responsibility for poverty reduction and the need for global partnership and clearly define the responsibilities of duty bearers.

Finally, the DGPs have the added value of describing well the main obstacles and deprivations faced by persons living in extreme poverty, of offering a picture of extreme poverty that reflects its horizontal (space) and vertical (time) aspects, and of recognising the principle that priority attention should be given to the poorest and most excluded.

The Association looks forward for the forthcoming consultation on DGPs that will be held on 22-23 June 2011 and the submission of the final draft of the revised guiding principles by the Independent Expert at the twenty-first regular session of the Human Rights Council.