



General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 May 2013

English and French only

Human Rights Council

Twenty-third session

Agenda item 3

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

Joint written statement* submitted by CIVICUS -World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Franciscans International (FI), the International Council of Women / Conseil International des Femmes (ICW-CIF), the International Movement ATD Fourth World, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status; Association Points-Coeur, Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23), Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance (BICE), the Dominicans for Justice and Peace (Order of Preachers), Edmund Rice International Limited (ERI), Global Hope Network International (GHNI), Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice delle Salesiane di Don Bosco (IIMA), the International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development (VIDES International) and the Programme on Women's Economic Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR), non-governmental organizations 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.

[10 May 2013]

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

Fighting extreme poverty through the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs*

Association Points-Cœur, Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23), Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance (BICE), CIVICUS-World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Dominicans for Justice and Peace (Order of Preachers), Edmund Rice International Limited (ERI), Franciscans International (FI), Global Hope Network International (GHNI), International Council of Women / Conseil International des Femmes (ICW-CIF), International Movement ATD Fourth World, International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development (VIDES International), Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice (IIMA), Programme on Women's Economic Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR), Social Watch (hereinafter the coalition) warmly welcome the Special Rapporteur's report on the question of the right to participation of people living in extreme poverty.

The coalition is pleased to observe that the report faithfully reflects the realities faced by people living in poverty in the context of participation in public life, and is in keeping with the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights¹. In addition, the coalition wishes to highlight the active contribution of a large number of experts, States and civil society actors to the preparation of this report. In this regard, we note with satisfaction the participation of the Special Rapporteur in the seminar organized by ATD Fourth World in Pierrelaye, France, which included people living in extreme poverty. The coalition welcomes this step, since it demonstrates the commitment of the Special Rapporteur to putting into practice the right to participation of people living in poverty, and acknowledges the work of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on this issue.

The coalition notes with satisfaction that the right to participate in public life is recognized as a means of addressing extreme poverty². This position takes into account the multidimensional nature of extreme poverty, which, in addition to being defined by economic deprivation, also has social, cultural and political dimensions³. The coalition therefore strongly supports the Special Rapporteur's statement that the lack of participation in decision-making is a cause of poverty and not just its consequence. For this reason, the recognition and fulfillment of the right to active participation in the conduct of public affairs must be considered a priority, as an integral component of development.

The coalition also welcomes the emphasis of the Special Rapporteur on the fact that people living in extreme poverty are rights holders and duty bearers. Poverty reduction strategies that are based on the principles of dignity, non-discrimination and equality, and that recognize the right to participation in public life, provide concrete tools for making claims that can be utilized by any individual. This duty of States to respect, protect and fulfill the

* Social Watch, an NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.

¹ Final draft of the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights, presented by the Special Rapporteur Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, A/HRC/21/39, adopted by consensus on 27 September 2012 in resolution 21/11.

² Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, A/HRC/23/36, 11 March 2013, §.17.

³ Following the definition of the former independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty, Arjun Sengupta: « Extreme poverty should be defined as a composite of income poverty, human development poverty and social exclusion, to encompass the notions of lack of basic security and capability deprivation », E/CN.4/2005/49, 11 February 2005.

right to participation has been recognized in numerous human rights instruments⁴, and constitutes a positive obligation that States should reflect in their legislation and national policies.

However, the coalition wishes to draw the Council's attention to the fact that the difficulty of ensuring the effective participation of people in extreme poverty is regularly presented as a justification of the non-application of this positive obligation. Yet the many successful experiences mentioned in the Special Rapporteur's work demonstrate that implementation mechanisms do exist and are feasible. In addition, through our presence at the grass-roots level, we have observed that development programs would make better use of available resources if all concerned population groups had the right to take part in their design and implementation.

Aware of the diversity of societies, the coalition agrees with the position of the Special Rapporteur that it is 'neither possible nor desirable' to establish universal guidelines for the right to participation. However, we encourage States to consider, in their interpretation and application of the right to participation, the general comments and recommendations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Human Rights Committee. Finally, the coalition notes that the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on May 5, 2013, constitutes an additional opportunity to clarify the scope of the right to participation. This is another step toward the greater empowerment of people living in extreme poverty to participate in public affairs.

The coalition supports all of the recommendations put forward by the Special Rapporteur, and in addition:

1. Encourages governments to fight against all negative stereotypes of people living in extreme poverty, as an underlying cause of their non-participation in political life;
2. Calls on States to fight against all forms of discrimination in the media and to promote the inclusion of human rights education in school programmes and in the training of government officials and practitioners;
3. Encourages governments to pay special attention to the participation of indigenous and local people affected by the establishment of mega-projects carried out in the name of development. These people often find themselves powerless in the face of multinational or non-state actors;
4. Encourages governments to pay special attention to the participation of women and that of young people in decisions directly affecting them;
5. Encourages States to promote the right to participation through a human rights approach in the debates of the 'sustainable development agenda' and the 'post-2015' agenda.

⁴ See Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 21 and 27), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Articles 13.1 and 15.1).