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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 Akshar Foundation, 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.

[20 August 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



India's Economic Growth and the Right to Development

Akshar Foundation (ECOSOC Special Consultative Status) (1) is a globally-recognized education NGO based in Assam, India, which works to upgrade schools into centers for sustainable development. Thus, schools become centers for children to learn about – and work towards achieving – the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The Akshar NEP 2020 Education Model upgrades free government-run schools into centers for sustainable development, by combining conventional academics with practical vocational training and community service projects (food relief, tree-planting, plastic collection and recycling, animal welfare, etc.). For example, Akshar parents are required to pay “Plastic School Fees”, weekly submissions of clean, dry plastic. We have achieved 100% compliance with segregation of plastic at source, and upcycling the plastic in the school’s Plastic Recycling Workshop, which also employs former child labourers part-time, so they can afford to stay in school. Akshar’s education model was lauded by the United Nations and World Economic Forum, awarded by the Earth Day Network, and amplified by media outlets including the Guardian (2), BBC, Reuters, Aljazeera, TIME, as well as national outlets in every region of the world.

Akshar Foundation is committed to teaching children how to face the challenges of tomorrow, especially combatting poverty and climate change. The Akshar model makes communities more resilient to climate disaster, for example, by converting schools into centers for food relief during the pandemic (3). However, the fight against Poverty must always take precedence over the fight against Climate Change. It is apparent that wealthier countries can afford their citizens the luxury and opportunity to give more care to protecting the environment, and, furthermore, wealthier nations tend to experience lower birth rates. Ergo, any measures which hinder economic growth will also hinder long-term climate remediation efforts. As such, any calls to diminish India’s economic growth should be dismissed and India’s Right to Development, as codified in UNGA General Assembly resolution 41/128, should be firmly upheld (4).

When middle- and upper-class visitors to our schools for the poor suggest that our students’ families should forgo the use of plastic altogether, our response is always the same: “You first.” So it must be with the obligations of wealthier nations to decarbonize and adopt costly strategies to prevent climate disaster. The costs should fall proportionately on those who have already contributed the most to the problem over the last few centuries.

India has achieved astounding economic growth, lifting a staggering 271 million people out of poverty in just 10 years, according to analysis from UNDP (5). Furthermore, India has achieved this economic miracle all while meeting the COP21 goal of 40% of energy from non-fossil fuels a full 9 years ahead of schedule (6). 271 million may just be another meaningless number to some activists, who see economic growth as the enemy of humanity, but it means more of our students have electricity at home, to power a light so they can read. And, as the late Swedish Professor Hans Rosling put it, it means more homes with washing machines, so parents have the time to teach their children how to read.

1. <https://www.aksharfoundation.org>

2. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/nov/25/the-indian-school-where-students-pay-for-lessons-with-plastic-waste>

3. <https://www.eastmojo.com/ourcoronafighters/2020/04/02/how-an-assam-school-is-helping-needy-people-amid-covid-19-crisis>

4. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-right-development>

5. https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/mpi2019publicationpdf_1.pdf

6. <https://www.iea.org/commentaries/india-s-clean-energy-transition-is-rapidly-underway-benefiting-the-entire-world>