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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: promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, 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.



Statement

Introduction

We, the Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, appreciate the efforts made by the United Nations to reach out to millions through the global survey entitled “My World”, which presents an important and unique opportunity to ensure that the voices of citizens are heard by their leaders on a global platform. There can be no better way to gather the aspirations of the people for the world that they want. We also commend the efforts of the United Nations to combat poverty, eradicate epidemics, wars and conflicts and establish a new economic system that ensures a fair distribution of wealth and consolidates bridges of trust among peoples across the world. The two major challenges that remain before the international community are:

- (a) How can we achieve universal human development while also ensuring protection of the planet so that humanity does not exceed its critical boundaries?
- (b) How can we tackle the growing inequalities?

Just policies

It is indeed important to listen to the voices of the people, especially those living in poverty, in order to empower them and achieve poverty eradication and social integration through full employment and decent work. The top six priorities of people all over the world reiterate the fundamental truth based on human rights. We need to focus more on the quality of life and less on gross domestic product. According to the Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University and Director of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Jeffery Sachs, there is now a rising worldwide demand for policy to be more closely aligned with what really matters to people as they themselves characterize their well-being. The United Nations needs to develop just policies, especially in the trade and financial sector, for better social integration.

According to the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, there is a link between taxation and hunger. He suggests that weak taxation and deregulation make it possible and profitable for multinationals to exploit farmland in the developing world in ways that undercut and marginalize local small-scale farmers. He argues that the taxes not collected from those companies become the funding shortfalls that prevent Governments in the developing world from financing, owning and implementing the multi-year, multisectoral food security strategies that are proven to reduce hunger. It is a commonly known fact that, without proper regulation and just taxation, no country can meet the needs of all its citizens, especially the vulnerable sections.

Decent work and social integration based on human rights

There are millions of people employed in unsafe conditions, earning wages that are much below the average. This is not only unjust, but also dangerous to the lives of those who are forced to work in such conditions. One example is Rana Plaza in Bangladesh. It is unacceptable in the twenty-first century to witness such an unfortunate end for those less-privileged workers who deserved decent work and a safe environment. The consumer society that enjoys the fruits of the cheap labour of

others is partially responsible, while the Government and the greedy garment industries cannot escape from moral responsibility for the deaths. Following the Rana Plaza tragedy in November 2012 in which more than 110 people were killed, the United States of America suspended preferential trade status for Bangladesh, eventually leading to the launching of a new garment sector safety campaign by Bangladesh and the International Labour Organization aimed at improving factory working conditions. While it was said that the successful implementation of the campaign would ensure better working conditions and safety for garment workers in Bangladesh, should we wait for such a tragedy to occur to propose the right policies and rules?

We reiterate that a human-rights-based approach is fundamental to attaining any development goals, particularly achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all. The international community should hold itself accountable with regard to human rights commitments and to a sustainable global enabling environment. In this context, the provision of official development assistance as committed is essential. This includes accountability in relation to commitments of global solidarity, whether through official development assistance or other mechanisms to ensure that Governments with the least resources are not solely accountable for improving the lives of their poorest and most excluded citizens.

Gender justice for a sustainable future

As half of the world's population, women play a crucial role in economic growth, environmental sustainability and poverty reduction. Nevertheless, more than one third of women in Asia and the Pacific still suffer from violence and insecurity, a glaring blight on efforts towards sustainable development. Ensuring the human rights of women and girls is imperative in achieving social inclusion, decent work and, above all, human dignity. Women's economic empowerment and full and equal participation in decision-making are essential to achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all.

Leave no one behind

The High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda identified five transformative shifts, one of which was the idea that no one should be left behind. While this is a commendable approach, critical implementation questions remain. How can vulnerable communities in developing countries protect their legal rights in the context of the current economic policy and its complex laws? How can the illicit money flow from Africa and other developing and least developed countries (which is double and triple the official development assistance) be stopped and used for social development? How can we close the loopholes in taxes, which are in favour of the fossil fuel and other extractive industries, and share the profits with the local people whose lives and lands are at stake?

International economic laws are complex and influence the lives of vulnerable groups in different ways. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has pointed out that between \$5 trillion and \$7 trillion goes to tax havens. This financial flow has deep income, wealth distribution and human rights effects on people around the world, creating opportunities for the few, but leaving

many behind. Unless the issues of land grabs, tax evasion and illicit capital flows are addressed, we can neither achieve the goal of leaving no one behind nor eradicate poverty.

In this context, the Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries urges Member States to develop just policies:

(a) To protect communities whose access to livelihoods is threatened by environmental pollution and natural resource exploitation by the fossil fuel and other extractive industries and the global commercial fishing industry;

(b) To close all loopholes in taxation, mainly tax evasion by transnational companies, and halt illegal capital flows from least developed and developing countries;

(c) To promote innovative sources of financing, such as a financial transaction tax, which could mobilize additional resources for the welfare of those living in extreme poverty;

(d) To prevent all forms of violence against women and girls and enable their full human potential, not only for their benefit and that of their families, but also for the betterment of society as a whole;

(e) To cancel the sovereign debt of the highly vulnerable countries so that they can use that money to reinvest in social development.

Conclusion

The international community is key to providing an enabling environment with just policies, while national Governments must lead the way by ensuring respect for human rights in implementing those policies. The growing popular movements and networks of advocates for vulnerable communities are a sign that States are not meeting the expectations of the citizens who elected them to power. There is a compelling need for a paradigm shift in the current socioeconomic system that allows two extremes: extreme poverty and extreme wealth. The existence of extreme poverty compels States, morally and spiritually, to act on behalf of the people's global sustainable agenda, addressing in particular the negative impact of extreme wealth, which oppresses the most marginalized in society.

We welcome and affirm the call of the Secretary-General for a life of dignity for all (see [A/68/202](#)). Until this vision is realized, groups such as Lawyers without Borders, faith-based organizations and other international organizations will continue to demand social accountability to ensure that the rules of the global economy work for everyone, not just for the rich and powerful.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Carmelite NGO, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominican Leadership Conference, Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo, Global Foundation for Democracy and Development, Loretto Community, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Salesian Missions, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, UNANIMA International and VIVAT International.