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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 Dominican Leadership Conference, 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

The theme of the current session of the Commission for Social Development resonates strongly among our constituents around the world. We are represented in more than 110 countries and live and work among some of the world's most vulnerable populations. From the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Philippines, from Solomon Islands to Peru, from Mexico to the United States of America, the questions are the same. Where is the political will to bring about transformative change? Where is the sense of the common good that would put an end to the inequality that dooms untold millions to a subhuman existence? At the fourth session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, the Co-Chair asked what the price of inaction would be. Perhaps this is a question worthy of the Commission's consideration.

Unequal playing field

According to the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, lack of power is a universal and basic characteristic of poverty. People remain disempowered when they have no access to the elements that make for a life free from fear and want. In its report to the Secretary-General entitled "Realizing the future we want for all", the United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda urged us to make globalization a positive force for current and future generations. However, its benefits are currently very unevenly shared. Moreover, it is stated in the report that persistent inequalities and struggles over scarce resources are among the key determinants of situations of conflict, hunger, insecurity and violence, which in turn are key factors impeding sustainable development.

In his report on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/67/179), the Secretary-General noted that growing income inequality undermined the possibility for persons living in poverty to participate in economic, social and political life. Yet, nothing seems to have changed; inequality continues on its destructive course. According to the report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations entitled *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2013*, a total of 842 million people in 2011-2013, or 1 in 8 people, are suffering from chronic hunger and regularly not receiving sufficient food to conduct an active life. Among the key elements of the report are the following:

- (a) While growth can raise incomes and reduce hunger, higher economic growth alone may not reach everyone, unless policies specifically target people living in poverty, especially in rural areas;
- (b) Hunger and poverty reduction will be achieved only with growth that is both sustained and broadly shared;
- (c) To improve the nutritional aspects of food security, nutrition-enhancing interventions are required in agriculture, health, hygiene, water supply and education;
- (d) Policies aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity and increasing food availability, especially when smallholders are targeted, can achieve hunger reduction even where poverty is widespread, when they are combined with social protection;

(e) Long-term commitment to mainstreaming food security and nutrition in public policies and programmes is key to hunger reduction. Keeping food security and agriculture high on the development agenda, through comprehensive reforms and improvements in the investment climate, supported by sustained social protection, is crucial for achieving major reductions in poverty and undernourishment.

Of course, the perennial question is one of funding. We respectfully urge consideration of the two alternatives set out below.

Scandal of military spending

In an opinion piece published in August 2012 entitled “The world is overarmed and peace is underfunded”, the Secretary-General addressed the dilemma that contributes heavily to the disempowerment of millions of people worldwide: global military spending. It is estimated that, in 2012, such spending exceeded \$1.7 trillion (more than \$4.6 billion per day), which alone is almost twice that of the United Nations budget for an entire year. Included in that amount are billions of United States dollars for modernizing nuclear arsenals well into the future. Money is being spent on weapons of mass destruction being improved, while inequality runs rampant. In a report on the costs of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the Millennium Project estimated the cost of meeting the Goals by 2015 as \$149 billion, approximately 8.4 per cent of annual global military expenditure and 23 per cent of United States spending for one year. Is there the political will to divert a portion of that wasted money to the basic needs of the human family? That would be a bold move indeed and would signal the transformative change that our world so desperately needs.

Innovative financing

Civil society has long been advocating a financial transaction tax, the proceeds of which would provide funding for social development and climate adaptation and mitigation. In June 2013, the development ministers of 11 States members of the European Union met and decided to implement such a tax. In their statement, they expressed a desire to devote part of the tax proceeds to development, noting that that significant economic revenue could help to fund the fight against great pandemics such as AIDS and malaria, as well as the fight against climate change and its already dramatic consequences for the world’s most vulnerable countries. They said that Europe would thus help to shape a fairer, more stable and more sustainable world.

Moral imperative

Pope Francis has spoken of “the scandal of poverty in a world of plenty as a piercing moral challenge for ... the whole human community”, noting that “a way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the Earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table”. He has called for “a new stimulus to international activity on behalf of the poor, inspired by something more than mere goodwill, or, worse, promises which all too often have not been kept”. This is clearly an aversion to the fact that the richest nations of the world have, for the most part, reneged on their commitment to pledge 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to the alleviation of abject poverty by 2015.

The question of what the price of inaction would be bears repeating. However, civil society alone does not bear responsibility for the answer. Rather, it is a question that goes to the very heart of global governance and the integrity of world leaders who seemingly turn a blind eye to the most vulnerable and marginalized among us. All the weaponry in the world will not make our planet a more peaceful, secure place in which humanity can thrive without fear or want. While no one Government can bring about the transformative change that is so desperately needed in our world today, all Governments bear a measure of responsibility to seriously consider the options that we know are available to us. This consideration must be done in the light of the overall common good of people and the planet, not out of narrow national self-interest.

Conclusion

As the Commission for Social Development takes stock of the extent to which it is actively committed to promoting the empowerment of people in this increasingly fragile and interconnected world, we urge it:

(a) To adopt universal social protection, defined at the national level, as a means of empowering people by providing them with the basic necessities of life and to make the investments in infrastructure necessary for social protection to flourish;

(b) To divert a portion of national military spending to programmes that support life and the empowerment of people;

(c) To adopt a financial transaction tax as a key way of addressing the pressing global challenges of post-2015 development and climate adaptation and mitigation.

We believe that Governments' movement in this direction, with the support of civil society, would be a significant step in favour of the common good of people and the planet and hasten the transformative change that we all seek.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of St. Joseph, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, IUS PRIMI VIRI International Association, Mouvement mondial des mères international, Passionists International, Salesian Missions, Sisters of Charity Federation and UNANIMA International.