



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 November 2014

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-third session

4-13 February 2015

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development
and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social development
in the contemporary world**

Statement submitted by International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 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

Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world is congruent with the work of the International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which seeks to deepen consciousness of world needs and channel the resources needed to speak and act in partnership with others for global justice.

Members of the International Presentation Association live and serve in 23 countries on five continents. Our work is multifaceted, culturally sensitive and conscious of the need for the Earth to be sustainable and for specific development endeavours. Some examples of our endeavours in the area of social development are:

- Advocacy for the use, within the Thai justice system, of language on land ownership and use that is understandable to those who are most vulnerable, specifically people living in poverty
- Work in partnership with “transition towns”, “transition churches” and sustainable local council initiatives in New Zealand that strive to promote and achieve sustainable living
- Promotion of culturally sensitive and transformative education for indigenous girls and women in Australia
- Provision of workshops to disseminate information on combating gender-based violence and on preventing human trafficking in Dominica and Zambia

Despite the many accomplishments, challenges still remain.

Social development requires a strong commitment to a sustainable relationship with the environment. This cannot occur until decision makers at the local, national and regional levels acknowledge the reality and serious consequences of climate change and take positive steps to counter its negative impacts. The wider community must also be educated on the consequences of human destruction of the environment and the need to preserve the environment for future generations. For example, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, schools are making progress in educating students about environmental concerns, as evidenced by reports that all students finishing fifth grade have an understanding of basic environmental issues. While indigenous cultures share a great respect for Mother Earth, there appears to be a chasm between this love of Mother Earth and the programmes that are in place to safeguard the environment. Recycling, sewage treatment plants and efforts to limit deforestation have been identified as particular areas that need to be addressed.

It is important to address the challenges that those impoverished by unjust systems face in participating in the sustainable development agenda. Reticence to recognize the collective agency of communities is a challenge that needs to be overcome. Inclusive social development cannot be achieved until the challenges of inequality are addressed. In particular, our grass-roots ministries continue to be concerned about the inequities experienced by people living in poverty, in particular: children; women and girls (the violence and cultural stereotypes and the barriers to education, ownership of land and participation in decision-making that they face are especially worrying); indigenous persons, refugees and migrants; and persons employed in certain sectors of the labour force. They are also concerned

about the challenges of job insecurity. In our experience, people-centred programmes and policies, community-based self-help groups and microfinance options have proved particularly effective in addressing the challenge of economic inequality for women in India and Zambia.

The current challenge of “rethinking social development” requires us to think beyond the progress already made.

The way forward

We recommend the measures set out below as an avenue towards the realization of a world that “leaves no one behind”.

Rethinking development requires viewing people as the agents of their own development. Working in partnerships in which local communities are consulted regarding their development is crucial to ensuring that the needs of those who are most vulnerable are met in designing any development agenda. Migrants and trafficked persons need to be respected and treated with dignity, and their human rights need to be protected.

A truly consultative and participatory approach to development is one that encourages creative development solutions to flow from the bottom upwards and recognizes the primacy of local wishes and realities. Participatory governance structures at all levels can assist this process. Neighbourhood parliaments in India are a good example of said governance structures.

A people-centred approach to economic growth has, at its essence, the prioritization of people and the planet over profits. Development is sustainable only if economic growth has at its core the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, self-reliance and interdependent relations between all elements of society. Such an approach requires increased emphasis on small-scale family farmers and rural industries, people’s cooperatives and biodiversity. Standards and indicators for development goals, particularly those goals associated with economic growth, must also be determined by national Governments in collaboration with United Nations agencies. The current poverty threshold of \$1.25 per day should be replaced with a measure of the satisfaction of fundamental human needs as envisaged by Professor Manfred A. Max-Neef in his book *Human Scale Development*.

Rethinking development requires focusing on a systemic reorientation towards transparency and accountability by both Governments and the private sector. An honest and credible election system for government officials is required in order to create an enabling environment for social development. This system must be understandable to and accessible by society’s most vulnerable. All people should be afforded means to communicate directly with government offices.

With regard to corporations, transparency and accountability require regular internal and external auditing of financial resources and respect for human rights and the rights of the Earth.

Information needs to be translated into local languages so that it may be shared by all. In addition, the strengthening of government partnerships with community-based, non-governmental organizations that regularly engage with the most vulnerable members of society would help to ensure that all voices are heard and that all people can participate in the social development agenda.

The International Presentation Association stands in solidarity with the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, in particular with his sentiment that social protection floors should be implemented as a human right in lieu of the more limited concept of “social safety nets”.

An enabling and empowering education that is free, compulsory, high-quality, available and accessible to all should be the primary responsibility of Governments and lie within the public sector realm. Such education must be provided in conjunction with infrastructure such as appropriate hygiene and sanitation facilities that are conducive to the continued education of girls once they reach puberty. It is necessary to provide education past childhood in order to build the agency and capabilities of local communities and to develop local technologies that are environmentally sustainable.

Services related to health, education, water and sanitation are basic human needs that must be made available as a matter of human rights. Governments and the public sector must continue to bear the primary duty for providing these public goods. Income-generating projects aimed at the economic empowerment of those living in poverty should remain primarily government funded.

In rethinking social development, it is necessary to rethink financing for development. Progressive taxation can provide the funds needed to increase budget allocations for social development efforts. It will be important to re-evaluate government expenditure priorities and to redirect a percentage of the funds spent around the world on militaries and arms towards an investment in development.

The International Presentation Association reiterates that, while “inclusive and sustainable development is the defining challenge of our era”, the distinguishing mark of plans and actions that meaningfully address social development is the adherence to the protection and promotion of human rights.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of St. Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Passionists International, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Salesian Missions, Sisters of Charity Federation, The Grail, UNANIMA International and VIVAT International.