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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: rethinking and strengthening social development in the
contemporary world**

Statement submitted by Salesian Missions, 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

If we are going to rethink and strengthen social development in the contemporary world, an issue that must be thoughtfully and vigorously addressed is inequality. This reality affects every dimension of society. Social unrest and social exclusion have been found to increase with rising levels of inequality. Those living in poverty and other marginalized communities have frequently been denied their right to participate in making decisions that affect their lives and their future. Social and economic inequalities are often seen in countries with democratic deficits and can also have an impact on the effectiveness of the multilateral system.

Level of inequality

Research has indicated that half of the world's population lives on less than \$2.50 a day, nearly 1 billion people live in hunger and close to 2 billion are trapped in multidimensional poverty.

Wealth has been found to be concentrated in the hands of just a few. The statistics are startling: the 85 richest individuals in the world have more wealth than the 3.5 billion poorest; the wealthiest quintile of people enjoy over 70 per cent of the world's total income, while the bottom quintile's share is only 1 per cent. This is clearly an injustice.

A new lens is needed

To confront the growing inequalities experienced worldwide, societies will need to emphasize our common humanity and our shared human rights, neither of which stems from our economic standing. When our starting point is mutual respect, we can begin to create a culture of acceptance and solidarity in which everyone is valued and no one is seen as useless, out of place or disposable. One of the first steps in achieving this lofty goal is overcoming the suspicion and hostility shown in the commonly unarticulated and yet deeply resonating belief in some societies that those living in poverty are largely responsible for their own poverty. This attitude does not acknowledge that structures of inequality have raised enormous obstacles to meaningful job opportunities for many men and women.

Mere tolerance of diversity is not sufficient to address inequality. In his message on the occasion of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, in 2014, Pope Francis reminded us that we must move away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization, towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world. It has been remarked that globalization has made us neighbours, but it has not made us brothers and sisters exhibiting mutual esteem and support. Inequalities tend to separate people and to make some of them almost invisible.

A process of structural reform leading to inclusion rather than marginalization begins when societies address the social, psychological and political effects of great economic inequalities. Economic marginalization limits peoples' access to education, housing and meaningful work, all of which is an affront to their human dignity. Additionally, excessive economic disparities among individuals and peoples

prevent societies from guaranteeing social justice, equity, the advancement of the common good and social and international peace.

It has been noted that social exclusion and inclusion ultimately have to do with what it means to be part of the society in which one lives. The excluded are not simply the underside, fringes or disenfranchised of society, they are considered to be non-members of society. The excluded are not simply the exploited, they are the outcasts. Sadly, membership in this segment of population is frequently a result of living in extreme poverty with few options and little, if any, voice.

Changing the economic structure

Inequality is often the starting point of a process of exclusion that cuts off large segments of society from meaningful participation in social, political and economic life. It is, in part, the result of a financial system that rules rather than serves humanity, leading to a utilitarian capitalism that views all people as mere consumers. Those living in extreme poverty, those living on less than \$1.25 a day, are seen as the bottom of the pyramid and unscrupulous marketers compete with one another to obtain as much of their money as possible. Inevitably, such inequality of economics and opportunity threatens the possibility for peace and security within societies and even globally.

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of 24 November 2013, Pope Francis noted that the need to resolve the structural causes of poverty could not be delayed and that as long as the problems of the poor were not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution would be found to the world's problems, or, for that matter, to any problem. He added that inequality was the root of social ills.

Some have posited that inequality is inevitable in a market economy. While this is partially true, the glaring economic differences between the haves and the have-nots do not allow us to be lulled into acceptance of a system that makes it possible only for those with immense wealth to increase their fortunes. The dignity of the human person must be the measure of every system and institution, and the structure of markets must reflect that perspective. Markets should exist to serve the human person and human communities, the common good. It is the obligation of society and government to structure markets to ensure that this happens.

Decent work

To overcome inequality, opportunities for decent work with a living wage must be a priority. Subsistence income generated by jobs taken only by the desperate has to end. Researchers have noted that the cycle of economic and social exclusion will continue to increase if there is no structural economic reform to remedy existing obstacles to greater employment and just wages.

In recent decades, income inequalities among and within countries have worsened. To overcome this, pay equity and a lack of job opportunities must be addressed. While gender inequalities are narrowing, this is happening at an extremely slow pace. Youth unemployment is very high and an increasing concern, because of its immediate and long-term effects on the generation of a sense of self-worth and the formation of a healthy work ethic among younger people. The social discontent

and distrust of government shown in many nations after the global economic crisis are indicative of the urgency of the need to address inequality head-on.

Policies need to be adopted to ensure that sufficient employment is created to provide decent work to new entrants into the labour force. Additionally, in a largely globalized economy where bargaining power has been reduced through informalization and liberalization, income and social policies must guarantee that workers are appropriately compensated. Registering and protecting informal work and ensuring compliance with minimum wage and antidiscrimination legislation should be included in these enforceable policies.

Recommendations

Given the increasing inequality and its impact on society and culture, as well as the need for all members of society to participate in the life and activities of the community in a safe environment and in a way that promotes their human dignity and growth, we recommend that Member States and civil society partner to address the root causes of inequality. As first steps in achieving this, we urge a commitment to:

- Addressing multidimensional poverty at the local and global levels. The data presented in the global multidimensional poverty index could serve as a starting point.
- Ensuring that social protection floors are universal and accessible, adhering to the Social Protection Floors recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), of the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- Examining budget priorities, especially budgets for military expenditures, to consider reallocating a portion of the funds to provide social protection floors.
- Implementing the shared societies framework developed by the Club de Madrid.
- Putting the ILO decent work agenda into practice through the implementation of the ILO four strategic objectives, with gender equality as a cross-cutting objective.
- Promoting the ratification and implementation of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), and Domestic Workers recommendation, 2011 (No. 201).