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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 Sri Swami Madhavananda World Peace Council and Yoga in Daily Life USA, non-governmental organizations 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Yoga as path for strengthening social development and worldwide peace

It is the declared objective of the Sri Swami Madhavananda World Peace Council to pursue the betterment of humanity's welfare by supporting international forums for dialogue between individuals, nations, cultures and religions on topics such as peace, ethics, spirituality, education, health, youth and environmental sustainability. Referring to this field of responsibility the Council aims at contributing to the 54th Session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development with the below statement on "Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world".

In its work the World Peace Council focuses at increasing unity and peace by disseminating the messages of Mahatma Gandhi "Be the Change You Want to See," and Sri Swami Madhavanandaji "One in All and All in One". These major principles of the Council's work are of high priority when developing a healthy and peaceful society. Where social development theory attempts to explain qualitative changes in the structure and framework of society that help society to better realize its aims and objectives, development can be defined in a manner applicable to all societies at all historical periods as an upward ascending movement featuring greater levels of energy, efficiency, quality, productivity, complexity, comprehension, creativity, mastery, enjoyment and accomplishment. Development is a process of social change which must have a strong motive that drives it forward. At the individual level, each person around the world is highly interested in leading the life she or he defines as desirable. Making everyone aware that, despite global challenges which might seem out of individual control, they can be the change they want to see and how to be role models in the present and for future generations strengthens the individual and helps develop a responsible, aware and peaceful society. These changes will first occur within the individuals' environment including various social and professional levels. The World Peace Council reaches out to everyone through its work, including high ranking officials and leaders.

Contemporarily humanity is going through a time of struggle in the East and West, South and North, in both developing and developed countries. In many ways, the world has become a small place where challenges are global and cannot be limited to single countries. This relates to environmental, social and economic challenges. Where some nations face long lasting wars and conflicts, others are involved in supporting or fighting these wars and other nations are struggling with the consequences of these conflicts. Based on various reasons different cultures and societies must learn how to tolerate differences and live together peacefully. Through the dissemination of global knowledge, nations know of each other's difficulties and solutions. Countries that face different problems such as poverty, conflict, terrorism, physical, emotional and mental sicknesses, isolation and frustration, have globally similar social development desires, namely a healthy and prosperous society. Despite the aforementioned issues, a shift in society can be seen with an increasing number of organisations and individuals focusing on positive and long lasting social change, aiming to achieve a healthy and prosperous humanity, worldwide. Although the SDGs are the overall umbrella guiding many organisations, several grassroots initiatives provide an evidence-base for a strong

social change worldwide. Awareness about sustainable solutions, increased living standards and global knowledge sharing make best practices available to everyone.

In this regard, the World Peace Council's work aims at contributing to a sustainable society by fostering world peace, cultural exchange, dialogue between religions and nationalities, ethics education and a healthy lifestyle. Despite the differences between nations, regions and cultures it fosters tolerance, respect and understanding among humans, animal rights and the protection of nature. To help develop a healthy and peaceful society globally, it also fosters physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being of the individual and the general community with the "Yoga in Daily Life" system, authored by the founder of the Council, Mahamandaleshwar Paramhans Swami Maheshwarananda.

Originating in India, yoga was brought into many countries with the Yoga in Daily Life system, thus unifying thousands of people under this approach. The yoga system focuses on sustainable consumer behaviour by advocating for respectful association with the environment, resources, animals and humans. It teaches reduced spending and increased happiness based on inner peace, rather than short term desires. Materialism, which is widely spread in developed nations as well as starting to spread within the wealthier societies of developing countries, cannot lead to real happiness; it can only lead to short term satisfaction, leaving behind environmental and societal destruction caused by unsustainable resource use. By assisting individuals to reach inner peace and a healthy body and mind, Yoga in Daily Life helps spread positive attitudes and behaviours across societies where these individuals live. Like a stone which falls into the water, one individual who benefitted from the Yoga system can change its environment and thus influence her/his society as a whole.

This yoga system is holistic and comprehensive; it nurtures the body, mind and soul and is based on the authentic tradition of yoga and the teachings of the founder's spiritual lineage. It aims at benefiting all people regardless of age, social status, nationality and spiritual faith. It is practiced by millions of people globally because it is unifying, including all those interested regardless of religion and origin. The system has proven beneficial for rehabilitative and preventative health purposes. It does not only focus on physical exercises but also breathing and meditation techniques, healthy eating habits and a healthy lifestyle overall. Practiced regularly it leads to a healthy body, a peaceful mind and increased awareness.

Besides yoga classes, the system provides books, lectures, events and seminars to everyone, nurturing spiritual health and increased understanding of important spiritual topics. With its programs in a large number of countries the yoga system steadily contributes to societal change. Nowadays even wealthy societies are not free from societal issues. In many Eastern cultures individuals still enjoys societal belonging based on cultural and family structures, whereas people in the Western world often face isolation and increased stress due to high economic and social expectations. Sickneses linked to depression and anxiety is rising. Yoga can help to relax the body and mind, increase awareness of life's priorities and the purpose of life, bring inner peace, tolerance and happiness.

Every year the Council organises peace conferences and gatherings. On October 2nd 2015, it conducted an international conference on "Yoga — a Path to Non-Violence and World Peace" at the United Nations in Vienna, commemorating

the International Day of Non-Violence. Two hundred delegates and representatives from NGOs, academia and other organisations from around the world participated. Statements and official letters of support for the conference objectives were received from executive state officials, local authorities, NGOs and academia from Austria, India, Hungary, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, USA, Croatia, Australia, Ukraine, Netherlands, Mexico and Germany, as well as personally from UNESCO director Ms Irina Bokoc, HSH Prinz Alfred von Liechtenstein and Mahatma Gandhi's grandson Mr Arun Gandhi. During the Vienna Conference, SSMWPC founder and conference initiator Vishwaguruji Maheshwarananda stated, "World peace is possible when all religious and political leaders practice tolerance, recognition and respect for all religions, cultures and nations. Our prime duty is to awaken the consciousness of forgiveness, brotherhood and oneness, that we are all children of one God. There is one religion to which we all belong — humanity". The World Peace Council and Yoga in Daily Life are working towards this objective, to strengthen social development in a world which faces several challenges at present.

To strengthen positive social development, more inclusive and peaceful initiatives are necessary. Our societies are still entrenched with intolerant and excluding belief- and thought systems. Teaching each individual tolerance and non-violence globally, respect of nature and animals as well as a healthy lifestyle is the key to fostering a prosperous society. Yoga is one way of reaching this objective.

The Council wishes the delegates and officials participating at the 54th Session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development much success and fruitful discussions.
