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

Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The immeasurable value of the human person

Social integration takes place at an individual level, by educating and investing in persons and enabling their creativity and natural capacities to develop and flourish. People must have access to the resources that they need to utilize their ingenuity and to make the best decisions for themselves. These resources include access to education, health care and skills training. The State is responsible for good governance, curtailing corruption and ensuring that conditions exist for human beings to bring themselves out of poverty and flourish in accordance with their intrinsic dignity.

Rather than solve problems posed by poverty, some policies treat people as the problem. Fewer poor people is not the same as less poverty. Governments and societies must choose to invest in the potential of people instead of promoting a world that has fewer people. Humans are innovators and problem solvers and when we encounter obstacles to development, it is critical that the person be empowered to step in and present solutions. For example, in the area of food supply, a growing population drives up food prices in the short term because of increased scarcity, but these higher prices can attract potential entrepreneurs who create new solutions, which can then cause prices to decrease. Human creativity can provide limitless opportunities to eliminate poverty and poverty-induced problems. People are not the problem. People are the solution, the most important and valuable resource of any nation, and social development policies should be based on the principle that all people are capable of contributing to their communities, nations, and the world.

Youth

The potential of youth is immeasurable, and investment in young people will produce endless returns. Such investment involves ensuring that they “be allowed to develop their full potential (including healthy physical, mental and spiritual development)” and that they “can develop, establish and maintain healthy lives” as stated by Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

According to the World Youth Report: Youth and Climate Change; youth constitute approximately 18 per cent of the total global population (1.8 billion people). In many countries, particularly in the developing world, there is a youth majority with the creative potential to transform society.

As a consequence of poverty and the associated absences of adequate health care, education and employment opportunities, much of the creative potential of young people is lost. Today, millions of adolescents, particularly girls, face the prospect of incomplete education, which increases their chances of living in poverty and of contracting infectious diseases. This absence of education prevents people from recognizing themselves and others in human dignity, through which people learn to implement new and creative solutions to the adversities they face. This is what makes them care about the welfare of their societies and families.

The strength of the family is of primary importance to young people because youth are a bridge between the family of one’s birth and founding a family as an adult. Family life influences the way they will respond to issues and difficulties in their lives. The encouragement and love a young person experiences in family life is

directly related to how well he or she performs in school and consequently has an impact on employment opportunities. Support for the family is therefore essential to recognizing and promoting the rights of young people, especially as they relate to poverty eradication.

Older persons

As young people, we cherish the older members of our families and communities who have been mentors and support for us. Older persons, aged 65 and older, have traditionally fulfilled the role of educating and passing on values to the younger generation; this role has ensured the progress of humanity and promoted a culture in which intergenerational solidarity fosters the common good, especially understanding the responsibilities towards future generations.

Worldwide, the overall responsibility taken by families to provide the ageing with care and support is diminishing. World Youth Alliance therefore stresses that the family as a whole must serve as the model of solidarity through which humankind can undertake the challenges presented by ageing populations.

Persons with disabilities

According to United Nations Enable, there are approximately 650 million persons with disabilities in the world, 80 per cent of who live in developing countries, many in conditions of poverty. The isolation of people with disabilities is caused by poor support systems and a lack of accessibility infrastructure, stigma, discrimination, myths, misconceptions and ignorance. These problems have a two-way relationship: disability increases the risk of poverty, and conditions of poverty increase the risks of disability. Disability leads to poverty because of limited opportunities for and discrimination against people with disabilities. Conditions of poverty, such as poor sanitation and lack of access to basic health care, lead to increased rates of disability among the poor. Too often, communities fail to provide the special health care and education necessary for the integral development of persons with disabilities.

The State must respect equal dignity and promote equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms for disabled persons, which demonstrates regard for the diversity of the human condition. Inequality leads to exclusion and marginalization that impedes human development participation in a society created by and for all, where each person develops a different role but has the same dignity and rights. Recognizing the dignity and capabilities of each person is essential for ensuring the full integration of persons with disabilities into the community.

In both developed and developing countries, disabled persons are targeted for termination based on their disabilities and the negative stereotypes about living with disabilities and disabled person. Genetic diagnosis and prenatal screening technologies are often used to identify persons with disabilities prior to birth, treating disabled persons like mistakes, like something that should be eliminated, forgetting that they are also human beings, and they have inherent human dignity. Member States in both developed and developing countries should adopt measures to eradicate these violations of human dignity and promote the integration of disabled persons into society, even if they have not been born yet.

Respect for human dignity begins with the recognition of our own dignity and that of others. This requires basic training to develop, participate in our own

decisions, and thus act freely. How can we promote social inclusion and human rights if, from the beginning we are discarding humans aside by the mere fact of illness, having a malformation or being unwanted children? Women are also affected by reproductive health education, because if they do not know the consequences of contraception and the value of every human person, they will not have the opportunity to make an informed choice about having children or not.

Conclusion

Solidarity is the foundation for social development — solidarity with every human person, regardless of ability, wealth, or stage of life — is the surest path to achieve inclusivity in our societies. Solidarity derived from the recognition of dignity in every human being. Social integration requires recognizing the role that human dignity plays in the lives of all persons. Social development requires strong and educated families who can teach these values. The World Youth Alliance thus calls on Member States to recognize this role and provide corresponding support for the family, the very first stage of the global community.
