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the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable
development: the role of digital technologies on social
development and well-being of all**

Statement submitted by Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America, 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.



A Socially Just Transition through Environmental Sustainability to Build Back Better

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, welcomes the priority theme of a “Socially just transition towards sustainable development: The role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all.” The priority theme presents an opportunity for global action, in the wake of the novel coronavirus pandemic, with a view to building back better with environmental sustainability at the center, aided by digital technologies.

Inspired by the social ethos of the Orthodox Christian tradition, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America, understands human beings as stewards of and inseparably connected with the earth. The marring of humanity’s relationship to the earth as its steward has created a destructive and insatiable desire to extract, use, and abuse the natural resources of the earth and has intensified climate change. A recent social document of the Orthodox Church, entitled *For the Life of the World*, underlines that human beings are part of the intricate and delicate web of creation, and that their welfare cannot be isolated from the welfare of the whole natural world. Furthermore, the destruction of the earth, fueled by greed, is also linked to the exacerbation of poverty and inequality. His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, also known globally as the Green Patriarch, has clearly and repeatedly expressed that poverty is not caused by the lack of material resources. It is the immediate result of our exploitation and waste. For the Patriarch, there is a close and crucial association between the economy of the poor and the warming of our planet. Conservation and compassion are intimately connected, while the web of life is a sacred gift of God -- ever so precious, yet ever so delicate.

All of this means that each of us dwells within a wider ecosystem; each of us is a part of a larger world and global environment. We are, then, obligated and called to serve our neighbor and preserve creation with a sense of humility and generosity as well as in a perspective of frugality and solidarity. As the world moves towards rebuilding in the wake of COVID-19, working to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the reduction of human impact through carbon emissions, greenhouse gases, pollution, and so on, must be at the center of recovery to aid in the promotion of new employment and long term economic, sustainable solutions for current and future generations.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), nations must act now toward including a green recovery in order to ensure the reduction of carbon emissions and a sustainable future. A recent report by UNEP on “Building a Green Recovery: Lessons from the Great Recession” details how nations can stimulate growth by building green economies. First, the removal of fossil fuel subsidies, supplemented with incentives for renewable energy and policy measures to support people affected by the subsidy removals, will reduce carbon emissions globally, possibly even generating revenue for various countries. Second, the implementation of “technology-push policies,” including research and development, as well as public investment and other areas, will fuel creativity for innovative and sustainable solutions.

These policies must also be targeted to increase private sector support and funding by rectifying market disincentives such as “technology spillover,” where inventions spread quickly and cheaply, thereby undermining further funding possibilities. Thailand is a recent example of working with different key stakeholders to drive solutions towards sustainability and reducing poverty and inequality.

According to a recent post on UN News by UN Resident Coordinator of Thailand, Gita Sabharwal, the Global Compact Network of Businesses in Thailand are working together creatively towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Accordingly, projects such as the creation of 'biocups' from palm trees or trials of electric motorcycle taxis, along with the commitment of the capital city of Bangkok to recycle 500 million bottles by 2025, are only some examples of partnership and innovation that will benefit all people.

The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals requires stronger partnerships between all stakeholders: Member States and Civil Society, public and private sectors, but also all generations and segments of society. Efforts for recovery must be human centered while at the same time being earth centered in order to ensure a more habitable and equitable home for current and future generations.

Therefore, we call on Member States to:

- Change the narrative and understanding of the human relationship to the earth as conqueror and instead shift towards a model of stewardship;
- Focus efforts to build back stronger together through the implementation and advancement of clean energy (power, water, and air) and renewable resources;
- Invest in research and development of green technologies, which in turn fuel economic growth, to support a more sustainable recovery;
- Implement policies that benefit people adversely affected by the economic recession and promote investment in green technologies that will ensure the protection of the environment while creating new opportunities for employment.
