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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: Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being, and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda**

Statement submitted by Passionists International, 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

In addressing “Inclusive and Resilient Recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions, Passionists International would like to highlight the following areas of special concern:

Haiti

Haiti remains the poorest country in the Latin America and Caribbean region and is among the poorest countries in the world. With a poverty rate of nearly 60% in 2020, infant and maternal mortality rates remain at high levels.

Haiti is also one of the most food-insecure countries in the world. According to the World Food Programme, nearly half the population – 4.4 to nearly 5 million need immediate food assistance, and among them, 1.2 million suffer severe hunger. Children are especially impacted: 22% are chronically malnourished and the number of children expected to suffer from starvation has doubled; 10 percent underweight, and 66% under five suffer from anemia.

Poor performance in the agricultural sector, heavy dependence on food imports, and accompanying price volatility make food products unaffordable to vulnerable populations. Chronic poverty is widespread throughout the country, and many lack easy access to electricity, water, sanitation or health care, according to World Food Programme.

Haiti remains highly vulnerable to hurricanes, floods and earthquakes. More than 96% of the population is exposed to these types of shocks, according to the World Bank. The Red Cross estimates that the 2021 earthquake affected 800,000 people directly: 2,248 were killed; 12,763 injured; 329 remain missing; 53,000 homes reported destroyed; 77,000 damaged. Haitians continue to experience widespread displacement. Likewise, many health facilities and schools were severely damaged or destroyed. According to the World Food Programme, 77% of people in the affected area live in poverty. This increases their challenges in recovering from the disasters.

Compounded by political instability, organized crime, food insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic, these vulnerabilities have been further exacerbated. According to the Red Cross, the affected population requires life-saving assistance and humanitarian aid, all under the constraints of a volatile security environment with high number of daily kidnappings, roadblocks and fuel shortages.

Haiti is experiencing an alarming number of deaths due to violence, its dilapidated medical infrastructure, and the fact that Haiti was last to receive COVID vaccines. Lack of access to oxygen and fuel supplies, medications and treatment protocol has resulted in the unnecessary loss of lives.

From our Passionist ministries and partners, we learn that while Haiti is besieged by multiple crises, it is largely due to a failed and corrupt government which grants impunity to increasingly violent gangs who are controlling the country by constant threats, rampant killings, kidnappings for ransom, and now blocking fuel distribution. As a result, Haitians remain without the most basic human rights and resources. There is no safety and security provided by their government, nor is there sufficient access to food, shelter, health care and education. Clinics and hospitals have frequently been forced to close due to gang violence and hijacking of supplies. People enjoy no freedom of movement because of escalating violence and the surge in kidnappings. Women and children are particularly at risk. Every day stepping out on the streets, Haitians risk their lives, and pray that they and their family will return home safely. Maintaining their livelihoods is not possible due to the extreme violence

spiralling out of control. Every day, it is a struggle to put food on the table, to obtain medical treatment and recover from COVID due to unavailability of appropriate medical equipment and supplies.

Haitians tell us they are suffering trauma and the long-term effects of it. They are suffering over what their country is becoming. People ask: “How is this living?” Though they are known and praised for their resilience, they are clearly being left behind. Recovery from COVID-19? We have barely provided them with the means.

Throughout the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, **civil society’s participation in decision-making** is repeatedly emphasized. Yet Haiti’s largely dismantled and ineffectual government and institutions, as well as the international community’s failure to engage and collaborate with Haitians in charting their country’s own course, stalls Haitian progress. Unless civil society is given the space and legitimacy to contribute to developing solutions to its challenges and determining what is necessary for democratic process, there will be no undergirding structure to support Haitians in achieving sustainable progress. Nor will they be able to escape the poverty, and the violence of poverty, that has been exacerbated by multiple crises, COVID-19 not the least of them.

Haitians want to be actors, not victims, and have already embarked on a process of national dialogue through the work of the Commission for a Haitian Solution, composed of members and leaders of civil society. **We urge the international community to support the continuation of this process so that Haiti can begin to rebuild itself and achieve a return to sustainable livelihoods, well-being and dignity for all, and the eradication of poverty in all its dimensions.**

Eradicating poverty in struggling countries will also require **alleviating debt**, which puts them deeper in the hole of poverty and unable to care for people and provide necessary social protections. Crushing debt prevents Haiti from ever getting a foothold in developing robust and sustainable economic, health, educational and social programs to meet the needs of its people. This kind of albatross makes progress of a nation nearly impossible. Current debt mechanisms penalize poorer countries. **We urge the World Bank to cancel all debts of Haiti and similarly struggling countries, and realistically re-assess the international poverty line which sets a woefully inadequate standard for living life in dignity, and ignores the most fundamental human rights.**

The **feminization of poverty** must also be recognized and addressed by all the member states. Gender inequality is pervasive and creates a lack of access to goods, services and opportunities to work and achieve economic stability to escape poverty and its deleterious and long-term impacts across the life cycle. Poor maternal and child health and nutrition affect human development, educational outcomes as well as future work capacity and opportunities. Poverty increases food insecurity for women and girls even within families, as they are often denied food in favour of males when there is not enough or sold off into early and forced marriages when a family cannot afford to care for their children.

Poverty also exacerbates the **digital divide**, as evidenced so prominently during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lack of digital access prevents those in more remote areas and poor communities from attending and/or progressing adequately in school, causing educational setbacks and contributing to social isolation as well. **We urge all member states to ensure universal digital access so that all students have the necessary tools and quality instruction to advance their intellectual development and capacity to engage in the world around them**, and to ensure access in all areas of economic and social development, information and justice.

Lastly, we urge member states to substantially increase their commitment to addressing the impacts of climate change, natural disasters and the destruction of biodiversity which has the greatest impact on those living in poverty and marginalized communities. The effects are already being shown across the globe. We have ignored the ways of indigenous people who have been the caretakers and preservers of our environment, and who themselves, are transgressed upon by corporate takeovers permitted by governments who fail to recognize their rights, the ecological ramifications and accompanying health risks to local people and the planet, as well as the increase of violence perpetrated against women and girls by workers in these exploitive industries. **We urge all member states to protect the rights of indigenous communities everywhere and to elevate their knowledge and practices as a pathway forward for a sustainable future.**
