



## Economic and Social Council

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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 The HETL Association, Inc., 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **Strengthening Social Development through Lifelong Learning**

Lifelong learning is a fundamental right of all people. One of the chief aims of the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association (HETL) is to improve social development and inclusion by transforming the scholarship and practice of teaching and learning in educational institutions. This statement will discuss some key initiatives developed by HETL to create a more inclusive global knowledge society by improving lifelong learning opportunities for all people.

#### **Introduction, Objective, and Purpose**

In addition to supporting the CSocD54 theme, the lifelong learning initiative also aligns with ongoing UN Education for All and Sustainable Development Goals initiatives. Since its founding, HETL has supported lifelong and lifewide learning and has fostered international understanding and cooperation by building a global network for educators to collaborate and engage in support of these initiatives. HETL aims to give voice to the common needs, concerns, and aspirations shared by the global higher education community and be a positive force for social development and inclusion.

HETL seeks creative solutions to the toughest challenges confronting higher education and the world. HETL addresses these challenges collaboratively through global dialogue, cutting-edge academic research, and sharing of best practices. A major strength of HETL is its diverse base of global perspectives that fosters creative thinking and meaningful dialogue and action.

To promote lifelong and lifewide learning for all as a human right, HETL conducts and publishes basic and applied research to develop new research methods, theories, principles, models, frameworks, taxonomies, and concepts related to higher education, teaching and learning more specifically. HETL works at the nexus of theory, policy, and practice to achieve this goal. A chief aim of HETL is to make higher education work for all by promoting it as a primary vehicle for lifelong and lifewide learning.

Within this broad context, the objective of this statement is to report and reflect on the HETL initiative called Lifelong Learning as a Human Right, a rationale and framework developed by HETL. The purpose of this statement, written for the 54th Session of the UN Commission for Social Development (CSocD54), is to report on this global initiative which supports and advances the theme, rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world.

#### **Overview of Main Issue**

A key element to the promotion of social development is to ensure that lifelong and lifewide learning opportunities are available to all people in all societies. Lifelong and lifewide learning is a human right because learning and education throughout all stages of the human life cycle is a key factor in a society's political, social, economic, and ecological development. In an increasingly hyper-connected globalized world, social institutions look to all educational levels to address an array of problems, such as improving economic opportunities and strengthening democratic systems of governance.

Growing recognition towards the necessity for lifelong learning is a response to the belief that all required learning for life can be achieved solely through a set number of years in formal education. This recognition, together with the decreasing shelf-life of new knowledge, has created a necessity for people to continually learn through every stage of life. In addition, the value of tertiary learning keeps increasing, including higher skills training or academic learning, as more employers require some tertiary education for entry-level jobs.

To address modern realities HETL has brought together educational scholars and leaders from around the world to research the topic of lifelong and lifewide learning. Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls on the global community to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. The HETL lifelong learning initiative addresses the following two goals:

Goal 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

Goal 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

The world has become more interconnected and interdependent due to globalization and internationalization. Because of the increasing complexity of the political, economic, social and ecological problems confronting the world, it is important that higher education institutions serve as one of the main vehicles for promoting social inclusion and sustainable development. To this end, HETL works directly with higher education leaders and scholars to drive policy and practice changes. Our ultimate goal is to work towards a social development framework that is specific to global higher education.

#### Accomplishments and Challenges

To achieve the aforementioned goals, HETL works in four key areas: networking, conferences, research, and publishing.

**Networking:** HETL has built one of the world’s largest networks of higher education professionals. To date, the HETL global network consists of over 100,000 leaders and scholars in the field of education. HETL uses several different communication platforms to connect educators for free, including social media and other web-based platforms.

**Conferences:** HETL convenes an annual conference that brings together educators from around the world to dialogue on ways to improve higher education and to make it work for all people in all countries. One of our main focus areas is social development and social inclusion.

**Research:** HETL conducts new research in the areas of social development and social inclusion. A few examples of the research that has been done recently includes: 1) the democratization of higher education; 2) social inclusion and higher education leadership; 3) higher education for social development, and; 4) global citizenship and higher education.

Publishing: HETL disseminates its research findings to the world through strategic partnerships with leading academic publishers and educational news outlets. The ultimate goal is to deliver results of the research into the hands of all educators and the public at large, in order to drive policy change and meaningful decision-making. Within the last three years,

HETL has published over a dozen academic books, over a dozen news articles and policy briefs, and over two hundred research articles in academic journals.

#### Expectations and Recommendations

The research conducted by HETL has shown that the second half of the 20th century and the first half of the 21st century in higher education were characterized by growing institutional diversification and growing heterogeneity of students attending tertiary education. This has been mainly a result of increasing demand for higher education by opening access to all by removing systemic ethnic, gender and class barriers. As a result, the global higher education system today has emerged as a more democratized system.

The democratization of higher education has primarily focused on access and participation in order to increase lifelong and lifewide educational opportunities for all. The democratization paradigm shift in higher education has focused on increasing individual economic and social opportunities, rather than on prescriptive one-size-fits-all approaches in order to promote a more flexible global higher education system that is better able to adapt to a wide variety of international political, economic, and social and ecological contexts.

As such, HETL's research shows that higher education development should be focused on creating more flexible structures that create more open educational systems and more lifelong learning opportunities for all. Thus, rethinking social development to address these new trends and research findings is imperative. Given the rapid rate of change brought about by globalization and internationalization, a more fully democratized global higher education system is needed to strengthen social development and inclusion around the world.

Thus, rethinking social development should include: 1) focusing on equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion in a more integrated and holistic way; 2) defining globally shared values centred on social justice and self-determination; 3) taking a more holistic, interdisciplinary, and integrated approach to understanding social development and inclusion; 4) promoting lifelong and lifewide learning as a human right, and; 5) focusing on development and capacity-building at all levels.

#### Conclusion

Because of the significance of lifelong and lifewide learning to the overall well-being of society, and concomitantly, to the progress of social development and inclusion, access to and participation in meaningful lifelong educational opportunities is now one of the main human rights issues of our generation.