



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

#### Fifty-first session

6-15 February 2013

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving  
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment  
and decent work for all**

### **Statement submitted by Dominican Leadership Conference, 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.



## **Statement**

At the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, the Heads of State and Government gathered and gave the highest priority in national, regional and international policies and actions to the promotion of social progress, justice and the betterment of the human condition, based on full participation by all. Furthermore, at the Summit, they reaffirmed the right of self-determination of all peoples, recognizing that empowering people is a main objective of development and its principle resource and that empowerment requires the full participation of people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions determining the functioning and the well-being of societies. The priority theme of the fifty-first session of the Commission for Social Development, “Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all”, provides us all with an opportunity to evaluate the extent to which we have committed our political will and our national and international resources to developing capacity at the base, thus enabling people to enjoy the self-determination which is theirs by right and which has been articulated in so many of the United Nations documents. This is also a timely moment to consider this theme from the perspective of the common good.

### **Empowerment and participation: not a given**

While there is no consensus on an exact definition of the term “empowerment”, the Non-Governmental Organizations Committee for Social Development offered the following as a working definition in its presentation at the expert group meeting in September 2012: empowerment is the expansion of the capacity, volition and vision necessary for people to become effective agents of human well-being. The World Bank sees empowerment as the expansion of assets and capabilities of persons living in poverty to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Though it is stating the obvious, people are deprived of the opportunity and the right to become effective agents of human well-being and to engage with the institutions that affect their lives if they lack the basic necessities that allow for a decent quality of life. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reminds us that persons living in poverty are caught in a vicious cycle of powerlessness, stigmatization, discrimination, exclusion and material deprivation; and that the lack of participation in decision-making is a defining feature and cause of poverty. Furthermore, despite the fact that participation is a crucial element in a human rights-based approach to development and poverty reduction, there is little consideration given to what is needed to create the environment in which persons living in poverty are able to be participatory members of their respective societies.

### **Increasing inequality**

In his report summarizing the fiftieth session of the Commission for Social Development (A/67/179), the Secretary-General noted the growing income inequality that undermined the possibility for persons living in poverty to participate in economic, social and political life. He also stated that income inequality, adverse employment conditions and lack of economic opportunities were manifestations of disempowerment that contributed to poverty and that empowering people living in poverty to participate in social, economic and political life was crucial to

eradicating poverty and achieving inclusive, equitable and sustained economic growth.

In June 2013, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda, will submit her report on the human rights-based approach to the participation of persons living in poverty in decisions that affect their lives to the Human Rights Council at its twenty-third session. In the report she states that all policies relevant to poverty must be aimed at empowering persons living in poverty and that those policies must be based on the recognition of those persons' right to make their own decisions and respect their capacity to fulfil their own potential, their sense of dignity and their right to participate in decisions affecting their life.

### **A sense of the common good**

So what must be done to make this participation a reality? What makes this kind of empowerment possible? It would seem that there are no terribly "new" solutions to this dilemma. We know what is needed — innovative financing, transparent and cohesive governance and a sense of the common good being primary. More often than not, however, the way out becomes obscured by rhetoric and a lack of political will, which, sadly, trumps any sense of the common good. The late Pope John Paul II, speaking on the notion of "solidarity", said that it was above all a question of interdependence and was not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortune of so many people both near and far. On the contrary, he stated, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all. It is abundantly clear that unless we invest in people by providing them with access to what is needed in order to enjoy a decent quality of life, we will all be held hostage by a world in which violence and instability are the norm. The Special Rapporteur reminds us that persons living in extreme poverty are of particular concern because their marginalization, exclusion and stigmatization often mean that they are not reached effectively by public policies and services. Obstacles, insecurity and structural factors frequently render it impossible for them to claim their rights and to fulfil their potential independently; they need active support from the State and other relevant stakeholders.

In its report to the Secretary-General, entitled "Realizing the Future We Want for All", the United Nations system task team on the post-2015 development agenda reminds us very clearly that globalization must become a positive force for all the world's peoples of present and future generations. "Business as usual" is no longer an option; transformative change is needed. One critical locus of this needed transformation is our conventional understanding of governance. The Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability notes that democratic governance and full respect for human rights are prerequisites for empowering people to make sustainable choices.

### **Conclusion**

As Member States take stock of the extent to which they are actively committed to promoting the empowerment of their people in this increasingly fragile and interconnected world, we urge them to:

- Consider the empowerment of people from the perspective of the common good of both the human family and the planet.

- Take seriously the vision for the future set forth by the United Nations system task team on the post-2015 development agenda, which rests on the core values of human rights, equality and sustainability.
  - Pursue innovative financing, especially the financial transaction tax, as a way of tending to the common good.
  - Promote a refocusing/restructuring of governance institutions to reflect greater commitment to the common good, as opposed to narrow national self-interests.
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*Note:* The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Congregations of St. Joseph, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Passionists International, Salesian Missions, Sisters of Charity Federation, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and UNANIMA International.