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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: promoting empowerment of people in achieving
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment
and decent work for all**

Statement submitted by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, 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 1995 World Summit for Social Development, States Members of the United Nations committed themselves to promoting social integration as one of the three goals of social development and recognized that poverty eradication is crucial to achieving such integration.

However, inequality and exclusion persist, and disparities and marginalization are expanding globally. Currently, 14 per cent of global income goes to the richest 1 per cent of the world's population, while a little over 1 per cent goes to the poorest 20 per cent. Gaps in income and other resources among racial/ethnic groups have expanded over time, as poverty exacerbates the oppression and social exclusion that these marginalized groups have endured for centuries.

Excluded and marginalized children and adolescents

Income and employment gaps place over 1 billion children and adolescents belonging to vulnerable racial/ethnic groups at risk of social exclusion, which is then visited on future generations. The 2012 report of the Secretary-General on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that indigenous children suffer extreme forms of exclusion and discrimination and that disparities between indigenous and non-indigenous children are pervasive within and across countries in all regions of the world.

Poverty also limits the social inclusion of African and African-descendant children, adolescents and their families, owing to the intergenerational consequences of enslavement and colonialism. In addition, poverty is due to the continuing structural racism resulting from the negative effects of globalization in Africa, the Americas and elsewhere. In a paper prepared for the eighth meeting of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, in 2011, Mirjana Najcevska cited evidence of extreme disparities in terms of poverty and marginalization between African-descendant peoples and non-African-descendant peoples in Latin America. According to 2010 United States Census Bureau data, the poverty rate for children and adolescents under 18 years in the United States of America was 24 per cent, with 12.4 per cent for white children, 38.2 per cent for black children, 35 per cent for Latino children and 13.6 per cent for Asian children.

Refugee children, adolescents and their families are among the poorest and most marginalized and excluded people and face major health, safety, educational, psychosocial and mental health challenges in countries of transit and destination.

The human right to social inclusion of all children, adolescents and their families

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the inherent dignity and worth of children and adolescents. It supports the social integration of children and adolescents by requiring that children be registered immediately after birth and that they have the right to a name and a nationality, especially where they would otherwise be stateless. The Convention provides for economic, civil, political, and cultural rights, including children's rights to survival, security, development and participation. It calls for Governments to recognize the right of every child to social security and a standard of living adequate for physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. These rights are inclusive of all children without discrimination, regardless of the race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or

other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status of the child or of his or her parents or legal guardian.

The Convention recognizes that in all countries, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions that need special consideration. Special articles cover refugees and migrants (22), children who are physically or mentally challenged (23) and children affected by traditional practices injurious to their health (24), trafficking and armed conflict. The Convention also provides for the social reintegration of children victimized by neglect, exploitation, abuse or torture and any cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The Convention calls for children and adolescents to be educated with a view to enabling them to achieve their full potential; ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; and ensuring respect for their cultural identity, for the values of the country in which they live and for civilizations different from their own, in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. It recognizes the right to quality education at the primary, secondary and higher education levels, as well as vocational education and guidance.

The Convention recognizes that the family is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of its members. The family is to be given the protection and assistance that it needs in order to assume its responsibilities, so that children and adolescents may grow up in an inclusive atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding. The fulfilment of the rights of children and adolescents depends largely on the full employment of their parents or other caregivers in decent jobs with a living wage and benefits, including access to health care and social services, as provided for by the Convention and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Why is social inclusion so important for children, adolescents and their families?

Poor mental health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and exclusion. The World Health Organization has reported that a majority of persons with mental and psychosocial challenges are excluded from income-generating opportunities, education, health, mental health and other social services. Social exclusion resulting from poverty and discrimination is related to stress, which has been shown by biomedical and psychological research to negatively affect the physical and mental development and functioning of children, adolescents and their families. Persistent exposure to high levels of stress can disrupt brain development, affecting learning and memory, which may result in educational deficits, and can suppress the immune response, increasing vulnerability to infections and chronic health problems. Adverse childhood stressors have also been linked to cancer, depression, cardiovascular disease, suicide attempts and substance abuse in later life.

Poverty, persecution, humiliation, social inequality and displacement have significant negative effects on the social identities, psychosocial well-being and sense of empowerment of individuals and groups, causing them to suffer social exclusion that continues across generations.

Recommendations

We urge Governments, United Nations agencies, and civil society organizations to:

1. Place the rights to survival, protection, development and social participation of marginalized and excluded children, adolescents and their families at the centre of policies and programmes aimed at poverty eradication and sustainable development.
2. Invest significant resources, especially front-loaded science-based investments, in support of infant and early childhood development, in order to increase the survival and life outcomes of children born under adversity.
3. Establish policies and institutional arrangements for all children to be registered at birth and identified under conditions of migration and disasters, so as to provide them with access to identity, health, educational and social services.
4. Implement the Social Protection Floor Initiative to provide for the basic needs of families belonging to vulnerable groups, including access to adequate housing and to mental health care within primary health care.
5. Target children and adolescents who continue to be victims of discrimination, providing them with full access to education and training that prepares them for full economic, social and political participation and that enables them to have decent employment and income.
6. Promote ongoing human rights participatory learning for children, adolescents and their families, especially those living in poverty and other adverse conditions, in order to foster their physical and mental vitality, resilience and activism, to alleviate stress and to advocate positive changes in their lives and the lives of others.
7. Provide human right education for all sectors of society, including education about the economic, social and psychological causes and consequences of poverty and social exclusion, so that those who are not affected can be receptive to interventions to eradicate poverty and promote the social inclusion of marginalized groups.
8. Provide opportunities for children and adolescents belonging to racial/ethnic and religious groups growing up in poverty, including those living as refugees or stateless or other displaced persons, to participate in decision-making with regard to strategies to alleviate poverty and to promote their social inclusion.
9. Develop policies and programmes aimed at ensuring the full employment in decent and adequately remunerated work of parents and parent surrogates belonging to marginalized and excluded groups.
10. Protect children and adolescents from any form of work that is harmful to their health or to their physical, psychological, spiritual, moral or social development.
11. Provide adequate interventions and services for girls and boys who have been trafficked and have been involved in armed conflict, hazardous labour or sexual exploitation, in order to address their physical, psychological, social and educational needs, including reintegration into their families, schools and communities.

12. Establish and maintain procedures for the collection of valid and reliable statistical data for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of social inclusion and poverty eradication, using indicators disaggregated by age, gender, race/ethnicity, religion, rural-urban location, sexual orientation and disability status.
