



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission for Social Development**

#### **Fifty-first session**

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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 Service and Research Institute on Family and Children, 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**

The existence of dehumanizing poverty in a world that has abundant human and natural resources defies both explanation and description. Embedded in the very fabric of the world's sociopolitical, socioeconomic, sociocultural and socioreligious structures, poverty continues to be increasingly multifaceted and complex. Poverty exists in the wake of the mushrooming market economies and political globalization that are responsible for rapid and uneven progress across the regions of the world and within regions themselves.

The debate today needs to be not only about questions of political power and influence but also about security, stability and the moral obligations of justice. Crucial questions concern: (a) the role of citizens and Governments in enabling the level of poverty to continue; (b) what Governments of prosperous nations owe poor countries; (c) the ramifications of trade and commerce with poor nations; (d) the extent to which technology displaces human endeavours and performance, creating large numbers of unemployed people and leaving no space for gainful employment or work opportunities because profit and competition are end products; (e) the reason for the transient quality of the relief that is provided in disasters instead of having solutions that bring about permanent change; (f) identifying what restricts nations or numbs so many hearts to the unfurling of day-after-day tragedies of unavoidable dimensions, tragedies that leave the poor without access to basic resources that help them stay alive; and (g) the number of people who exist without some or all of the most basic needs for life.

### **Imprints of poverty**

Being poor is not the equivalent of poverty. Poverty is the human experience of inhuman deprivation in a world rich with resources created for all but enjoyed and exploited by a few. It is the human experience of discrimination in a world where all are created alike but isolated and excluded because of race, socioeconomic status, colour, or caste. It is the human experience of being made voiceless, powerless and silenced in a world where all have a right to speak, to hear and to be heard.

### **Families in poverty and poverty in families**

Poverty is intergenerational. It creates conditions conducive to dependence and addiction, which have an impact on successive generations. Poverty affects the formation, structure and functions of individual family members and families as a unit. It disables the family from carrying out its functions of caring for and nurturing its members and of exercising its responsibility for their socialization. Families are the primary agents of social integration and social protection and provide a supportive environment for the elderly and for infants. Families provide for the education, training and health of their children, youth and young adults, who are constantly battling deprivation, insecurity and tensions because of scarcity of means and sustenance. With the inevitable concentration on the problems of daily subsistence, families are crippled in their ability to function optimally.

The physical consequences of poverty are well known, especially the long-lasting effects that malnourishment has on physical and mental development. In the context of the theme of the Commission for Social Development we need to

draw upon the resources available from behavioural sciences to address the impact of poverty on cognitive and emotive development in the early stages of infancy and childhood. Erik Erikson's eight stages of human development throw a light on the impact of poverty on physical and mental development. What happens in early life impacts individuals later on, minimizing their capacity or rendering them incapable of functioning physically, psychologically, and economically.

### **Emerging from poverty**

Persons in poverty cannot emerge from poverty by themselves. Support systems are indispensable. The United Nations, nation States, global and multinational institutions and organizations, the corporate community, civil society and religious groups need to work collaboratively not only to create work opportunities but also to ensure "humanization of employment and dignity of labour", in distinct contrast to mechanization, undue profits and unethical competition.

### **Pro-active approach**

Placing families at the centre of efforts to eradicate poverty is an innovative approach and has been the "missing link" in all development programmes. It is based on a radical set of principles, values and beliefs that recognize the critical role of the family as the constant focus in poverty eradication. It entails working with families from a strengths-based perspective, relying, utilizing and building on the resources inherent within the family itself. Such an approach employs an empowerment paradigm and develops collaborative partnerships with families. Families are essential to humanity's future; their strengths and weaknesses reflect the fabric of society. Hence, strengthening the quality of families is an intrinsic and highly pro-active approach to poverty eradication.

### **Capacity for decent employment and optimum productivity**

The most urgent problem that families in poverty face is that they find no answer in fragmented forums or one specific programme. The response to the problem should be the formulation and implementation of family-sensitive policies that strengthen families as units and ensure social support systems to enable families to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. Such policies must ensure the optimum health of children, a stable family life, humanized employment, adequate purchasing power and enough security to allow the family to provide for the health, education and employment preparation of all of its members.

It behooves all stakeholders to collectively build their domain, setting in place values that are consistent with human dignity, justice and equity, not only among nation States, global and multilateral institutions and civil society but also within and among families. The person should always be at the centre of concern as an end and not as a means.

The call is for a conscious civil society, and for a consciousness and a sensitivity that will allow the call to be answered, and for it to be answered as it has been through the ideas, thoughts and actions of several powerful and influential individuals: the pedagogy of Paulo Freire; the justice of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi; the compassion of Mother Teresa; and, in a contemporary context, the powerful writings and the invaluable contributions of the many people

who silently work for the liberation of humanity. Quoting from the report of the Secretary-General entitled “In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all” (A/59/2005), “If we act boldly — and if we act together — we can make people everywhere more secure, more prosperous and better able to enjoy their fundamental human rights.”

Our world has abundant opportunities. The failures of humanity include the irresponsible exploitation of the world’s resources and the accumulation of wealth by a few at the cost of larger sections of humanity. The rich and powerful need to create the kind of conditions that foster humankind. Families must be able to have lifestyles and values that not only honour their well-being but that also ensure that poverty does not exist amid plenty. Such collective intentions, policies and actions will contribute to reaching the Millennium Development Goals and to implementing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015.

The Service and Research Institute on Family and Children makes a humble and urgent plea to the United Nations to establish a charter on the rights of the family.

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*Note:* The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status: Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and VIVAT International.