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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 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.

* E/CN.5/2015/1.



Statement

Albert Einstein once said that no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. This seems noteworthy advice as we consider the priority theme of the fifty-third session of the Commission for Social Development: “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”. It is also very significant that this theme will be discussed as we mark the twentieth anniversary of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations. What better time for a clear and transparent consideration of this theme, from a perspective that recognizes that the business-as-usual approach is woefully inadequate and largely responsible for the precarious state of our world today.

Drawing from our founding inspiration

After the Second World War, those who crafted the Charter of the United Nations took great pains “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small” and “to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples”. In chapter IX of the Charter, on international economic and social cooperation, it is acknowledged that conditions of stability and well-being are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples (Article 55). Yet, 70 years later, the world is more unequal than at any point since the Second World War and global security is severely undermined by the resulting conflict within and among nations. Furthermore, the phenomenon of global climate change and the compromised state of the planet continue to have far-reaching negative impacts on global food security, the availability of water and the massive movement of peoples from areas that are no longer sustainable. How can we rethink and strengthen social development in the context of such seeming self-destruction?

Have 20 years made a difference?

At the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, the world’s leaders acknowledged that they had responsibility to address profound social problems, especially poverty, unemployment and social exclusion, and to address both their underlying and structural causes. They also recognized that, while social justice and social development were indispensable for achieving and maintaining peace and security within and among nations, neither could be achieved in the absence of peace and security, nor in the absence of respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The leaders who adopted the Copenhagen Declaration recognized this essential interdependence in the Charter of the United Nations and highlighted the interdependence and reinforcing nature of economic development, social development and environmental protection.

Twenty years later, this integrated vision of development is sorely lacking. Inequality continues to jeopardize economic growth and poverty reduction and to stall progress in education, health and nutrition, thus undermining the essential human capabilities necessary for a good life. Inequality has limited access to economic, social and political resources, and has been driving conflict and destabilizing societies worldwide. In *World Social Protection Report 2014/15*:

Building Economic Recovery, Inclusive Development and Social Justice, the International Labour Organization (ILO) notes that only 2 per cent of the global population enjoys access to comprehensive social security systems, while 73 per cent is covered partially or not at all. ILO cites this lack of access as a major obstacle to further economic and social development. We concur with the conclusion that social protection, specifically social protection floors, are essential for recovery, inclusive development and social justice, and must be part of the post-2015 development agenda.

Sustainable development goals: superficial change or genuine transformation?

In July 2014, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals shared the fruit of a long process of consultation and negotiation that resulted in 17 goals, universal in scope, with sustainability at the core. In September 2015, the General Assembly will adopt these sustainable development goals as part of its post-2015 development agenda. The degree to which this agenda will be truly transformative is debatable. In order for integral social development to take place, we need to undergo an authentic transformation of both mind and heart that will enable us to see from the perspective of those who are and have been on the underside of development models. To rethink social development from this perspective is to acknowledge that the fossil-fuel, profit-driven approach that has been the norm is no longer tenable because, while it has clearly worked to the advantage of some, it is no longer able to respond to the basic needs of the vast majority of the world's people. Furthermore, this business-as-usual approach has compromised the viability of Earth to what many believe is now a tipping point.

In 1995, in the Copenhagen Declaration, leaders acknowledged “that people are at the centre of our concerns for sustainable development and that they are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with the environment”. In 2015, this statement assumes an even greater urgency. In its recent report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made it clear that we are responsible for the dangerous shifts in the world's climate patterns and that a reduction in carbon emissions is at the heart of the issue. The resulting devastation of land, the depletion of resources, including water, and the loss of homes and livelihoods stand in stark contradiction to our belief that people are at the centre of development. Studies indicate that, in Africa alone, nearly 250 million people will experience water shortages by 2020. Our concern for people, then, will ultimately be measured by our willingness to make a commitment to reduce global carbon emissions. To ignore the connection between the development of people and the health of the planet is perhaps one of the greatest follies our times. In a sense, this is where our efforts to rethink and strengthen social development may face their greatest challenge.

What is required of us?

The late Pope John Paul II spoke of solidarity as a persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, because each one of us is really responsible for all of us. As such, rethinking and strengthening social development requires a transparent examination of the extent to which this Commission, and all Member States, are willing to put the business-as-usual approach aside and recognize our common humanity. At the end of the day, poverty hurts us all, as does global climate change. Both poverty and climate change are drivers of global insecurity and armed

conflict. The world has the resources, financial and otherwise, and the expertise to bring about transformative change in the lives of millions of men, women and children today, and to give hope to future generations that they can live on a thriving planet. Why would we not want to do this?

Recommendations

In marking the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations and the twentieth anniversary of the Copenhagen Declaration, Dominican sisters and brothers, represented in over 100 countries and working among some of the most vulnerable members of society, respectfully make the following recommendations, which, if taken seriously and implemented in a timely fashion, would make an unprecedented contribution to our common destiny and the health of the planet:

(a) Adopt nationally defined universal social protection floors as a means of empowering people by providing them with the basic necessities of life and make the necessary investments in infrastructure in order for social protection to flourish;

(b) In keeping with the Copenhagen Declaration and its clear commitment to place people at the centre of development, divert a portion of global military spending to programmes that support life and the empowerment of people. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, in 2013 alone global military spending reached \$1,739 billion, while the United Nations budget for 2012-2013 was \$5,152 million. As we rethink and strengthen social development, are the world's people any better off for having spent so much money on the refinement of weapons of destruction?;

(c) Adopt a financial transaction tax to address the urgent need to find innovative ways to finance the post-2015 development agenda.

We trust that the participants in the fifty-third session of the Commission for Social Development will, through decisive leadership, move forward in a direction that serves the common good of both people and planet.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Pax Christi International, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary and Sisters of Charity Federation.