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twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority
theme: rethinking and strengthening social development in the
contemporary world**

Statement submitted by Organización de Entidades Mutuales de las Américas, ODEMA, Asociación Civil, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Mutualism And Social Solidarity Economy And Its Relationship With The Development Agenda

The 53rd periodic session report of the Commission for Social Development outlined the importance of decent employment and the need for having wider social policies as well as social protection for the achievement of real sustainable development. It was also determined that social protection was key to reducing poverty, inequality and exclusion: an approach based on these rights was a key factor of development centred around the wellbeing of persons, which should be the main aim of social development.

It was also stated that by giving better support to families, improving the well-being of children (both genders) and ensuring a healthy balance between work and family constituted crucial elements to obtain a better quality of life, improving the economy and promoting social development. A major commitment should be made to strengthen participation of younger generations both at the national and international level. The same thing is true for the protection of the rights for older persons. These commitments can be placed under the existing frameworks for action at national and regional levels.

In this sense, social and solidarity economies gain impetus by bringing relief to those who suffer poverty, helping them draw on the mutual efforts of people and peers to satisfy their needs.

Mutualism, in particular, can uphold a solidarity economy, and is one of its more genuine entities, successfully applying the methodology of cooperatives' and association frameworks. Mutualism responds to seven basic principles: voluntary adhesion, democratic organization, institutional neutrality (political, religious, racial and syndicate free), monetary contribution according to the services received, social capitalization of revenues, social capitalization (betterment of services rendered) and mutual integration for development.

These seven basic principal values of the mutualist doctrine have been practiced in a natural way for as long as mankind existed, and is also present today in the form of modern mutual self-help systems. Therefore, mutualism and the principles exposed can ensure a path for sustainable development after 2015 and serve as a common framework for action and cooperation to promote development.

As a way to support the efforts of the international community and taking into account post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, American mutualism has adopted initiatives seeking to comply with the objectives and aims for sustainable development. These actions have as a main priority to ensure the dignity of human beings, to promote and establish a basic universal social protection floors and help to obtain a more inclusive and equitable economy.

The main aim of the social protection floor is to reduce social and economic inequities, to promote equality of opportunities, empower women, assure access to primary and secondary education, improve health by providing primary health care and guarantee food security and nutrition. This integrated approach guarantees social protection of the population, from the point of view of economic inclusive growth and aid in promoting the basis for more sustainable development.

The European Parliament, in its report “The role of mutual societies in the 21st century” proposes the following definition: “Mutualities are voluntary groups of persons that, more than obtaining revenues on their investments, try to attend first-hand the needs of their members. They work in accordance with the principle of solidarity between its members, who take part in the management of the company. Beside cooperatives, foundations and associations, mutualities are one of the principal components of Social Economy.”

Current mutualities, working in the area of health and insurance, are the inheritors of the “mutual help societies” that existed in Europe during the Middle Age. These societies were composed by persons that wanted to protect themselves against risks. They differ fundamentally from commercial insurance societies as they are non-profit organizations, based on the principles of solidarity and democracy. In addition, they share risks between members, whereas commercial insurances only accept partial risks of their clients in exchange for a premium.

The principles of mutualism originated in the 19th century, during the workers labour movement, which valued the importance of solidarity as well as access to a medical services for all. Today these principles are the basis in which our social security public system is built.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to develop an acceptable social protection system without the State creating or aiding its establishment. It is imperative that the State, or the agents of the social protection, apply or take part in formulating policies directed at improving the quality of people’s lives.

The aim of mutualities is not growth, but the development of a wide social protection net. As a result, its functions are complementary and interdependent with the public social protection system. Mutualities constantly adapt to new contexts and re-define their professional services depending on the evolution and needs of the public system.

Nowadays, the Organization of Mutual Entities of the Americas (ODEMA) offers protection systems that enable favourable economic, physical and social environments that are within reach of more than 20 million people. As real agents of change, mutual entities of the continent and of the world in general, constitute a base for human sustainable development and a fundamental generator of strategies aimed at achieving major levels of inclusion: developing actions, programs and practices that seek to improve human well-being, and promoting social protection as guarantee of equity in urban development.

During the annual ECOSOC forum, deputy secretary general of the United Nations, Jan Eliasson, affirmed that no nation or organization can advance alone in the resolution of developmental problems. Local, national, regional and global alliances are crucial to finding solutions to developing problems and associations can turn into engines of progress if they operate in a transparent, inclusive and responsible way.

In conclusion, mutualities contribute to finding answers to the challenges facing social protection systems, whatever their developmental level. They respond even better, because the values on which mutualism are based are also present in the founding principles of universal social protection: mutualities act in accordance with the principles of solidarity constituting long term protection for all, without exclusion, nor dependant on the inherited risks they represent, or the basis of their

income. In this respect they act in agreement with public function and respect to the principles of universality and solidarity. Mutualities are not only limited to welfare or vulnerable persons sectors, instead they work through the principles of solidarity and reciprocal responsibility.
