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3 (b): Population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development

Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council²

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.

¹ [E/CN.9/2020/1](#).

² The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The World Youth Alliance is a global coalition of young people dedicated to the promotion and defence of human dignity in policy and culture and building solidarity between young people in developing and developed countries. With over 200,000 young people as members in more than 130 countries, we welcome the opportunity to address the commission on the thematic areas highlighted; population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development.

The World Youth Alliance takes as its starting point the conviction that human beings are the world's greatest resource and that human creativity is a natural catalyst for development. Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration states that "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." This principle is reiterated in the ICPD Programme of Action, which describes people as the most important and valuable resource of a nation and states that countries should ensure that all individuals are given the opportunity to make the most of their potential. This requires optimism about people and their ability to contribute to the betterment of society, rather than a pessimistic view that growing population necessarily results in increased poverty and the depletion of natural resources.

The dignity of the human person offers a clear criteria for identifying development policies that will lead to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals. Policies must first recognize the great potential of the human person to be a creator, not just a consumer. Human creativity and hard work have driven infrastructure, technology development, and innovation, bringing more food and resources to more people. Policies should focus on creating conditions for human flourishing by prioritizing basic health care, education and vocational training, governance structures that encourage domestic and foreign investment in business, and investment in infrastructure that will give people access to services and markets. Policies that distract from this make persons an obstacle to development rather than its object.

Person-centred development recognizes that human beings have inherent dignity – value that is not dependent on a particular time, place or situation in society. The freedom proper to human dignity cannot be compromised for economic goals, no matter how laudable. Human beings are the objects of sustainable development and economic prosperity and all population and development policies must be oriented around this principle.

We place great value on our natural environment as a source of both physical sustenance and immeasurable beauty to be cared for with wisdom and temperance. Meeting the basic needs of human beings for shelter, energy, water, sanitation and food in a timely manner is crucial to preventing and reversing much of the environmental degradation we see today; any environmental crisis is connected to a human crisis. Human creativity is the driver behind policies that will sustain the environment for future generations. New ideas about how to channel energy and develop "green" ways of doing business are produced by human beings, the very objects of sustainable development.

Recognizing that irresponsible actions can lead to environmental degradation, we must foster responsible stewardship in every society. Each human being is called to recognize his or her personal responsibility, which springs from the intrinsic value and inherent dignity of each human person. Responsible stewardship is the personal commitment to care for both earth and neighbour. We affirm that responsible stewardship begins in the family and extends to both local and global communities.

Human beings are the earth's greatest source of potential solutions for authentic development. Their unlimited creative capacities, a reflection of their inherent dignity, enable persons to harness the knowledge and skills which drive authentic development. When we ensure every human has their fundamental needs met, we are equipping people to be creative problem solvers. Governments should support people through just laws, institutions, infrastructures, and decent working conditions. Having those needs met helps people become agents of authentic development.

The ICPD Programme of Action, adopted in 1994 by 179 Member States, places the human rights of individuals, rather than numerical population targets, at the centre of the global development agenda. However, it also undermines this important element with population-related goals, and since its adoption review conferences, including the Nairobi Summit, have focused almost exclusively on its most controversial elements, ignoring the delicate balance on contentious practices such as abortion and comprehensive sexuality education.

Since human capital is our most important resource, responsible stewardship is necessary for sustainable economic development. Population management programs categorize human beings, especially vulnerable populations, as burdens instead of essential participants in long-term economic development. The premise that fixed resources and equitable distribution require fewer individuals is not only flawed but inconsistent with human dignity. Population management programs ignore the real causes of economic growth: anti-corruption policies, protection of basic human rights, access to education and investment in infrastructure.

Proper social and cultural development is a necessary condition for, rather than a result of, a thriving economy. When societies are built upon respect for human dignity and the family, sustainable economic growth follows, demonstrating that cultural and human capital are the primary resources driving overall human development.

Governance that is person-centred must respect the family as the fundamental unit of society. The family sustains society and has the responsibility of forming free and responsible citizens, thus securing democracy, and sustaining civilization and culture. The family takes on essential tasks in the care of all especially the weakest and most vulnerable. We emphasize the need for social and economic policies that strengthen the family and safeguard the rights and responsibilities of its members. Good governance also seeks to ensure that the fundamental needs of all, including physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional, are met through integral development and poverty eradication. Only when these needs are met is it possible for all people to flourish. The State should promote policies that provide for people's basic needs and allow integral human development.

Food insecurity is prevalent on a large scale in developing countries. The goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger can be accomplished if communities are empowered to work in solidarity with one another and to optimize resource use. In the developing world, the family and extended family are unmatched in providing shelter, food, care and education to its members, often in very difficult circumstances. Any policy that aims at reducing the prevalence of hunger and poverty must be oriented around strengthening and protecting families and direct appropriate resources and political will towards creating conditions for food security and good nutrition.

We recognize the right of each person to the highest attainable standard of health. Health affects individuals' participation in the work and social spheres. Good health requires not only medical care, but also clean water, sanitation, good nutrition, psychological wellbeing and the education necessary to comprehend medical advice and make informed decisions. Noting that maternal and reproductive health present a

continuing challenge and a particular concern in both developed and developing nations, efforts should be made to promote knowledge-based healthcare for all.

We acknowledge that the primary responsibility of education rests on the parents and it is the obligation of the State to support them in this role. Quality education must be available to all on an equal basis and should flow from an authentic understanding of the human person, and foster respect for self and others in solidarity. SDG 4.7 aims to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Good health and quality education are essential for authentic development. They equip people with opportunities to thrive as individuals and as members of their communities. Health and education foster human creativity and ingenuity facilitating prosperity, equality and responsible management of natural resources.

Investing in the human person, in a climate of freedom and respect, leads to integral human development and economic growth. Investing in the human person requires investing in healthcare and education, as healthy and educated persons can reach their potential in the workplace, engage civilly and raise healthy families, thus contributing to the economy. A society that recognizes, supports, and encourages the value of occupations that respect human dignity, including informal care-giving, allows for the maximization of human capital and economic growth.

We invite the Commission, Member States, and persons at all levels of society to use their creativity, skills and resources to create the necessary environment for authentic development.
