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High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by China Society for Human Rights Studies (CSHRS), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Efforts and Achievements of China in Poverty Alleviation in the Context of COVID-19

The COVID-19 Pandemic has had devastating impacts throughout the world on all spheres of life and, particularly, on the economy, social security, education, and food production. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19, China's nation-wide effort to contain the Pandemic has yielded remarkable success. China has proactively taken measures to prevent or mitigate the Pandemic's impact on the enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights, particularly those of the most vulnerable groups in society. In tackling the Pandemic, China has fully taken into account its binding international human rights obligations, especially the rights to health, housing, food, and water.

Despite that the COVID-19 Pandemic is a "stress test" of the poverty alleviation system, China still keeps her commitment to eradicating poverty as planned. One of China's landmark achievements over the past four decades has been the large lifting of hundreds of millions of Chinese people out of poverty. The World Bank has long hailed China's remarkable alleviation efforts, which have lifted 850 million from extreme poverty since the late 1970s. China has pledged to deal with the problem like "a hammer striking a nail". By the end of 2020, there will be no Chinese citizens living under the national poverty line of 2,300 RMB per year by the constant price of 2010.

1. The impact of COVID-19 on China's Poverty Alleviation Goals

Admittedly, the COVID-19 poses a tough challenge to China's goal of eradicating all extreme poverty by the end of 2020 and further to mitigate the income and wealth inequalities within the country.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 has made some industries to suffer from employment losses and unemployment rates to rise. Reduced income led to a reduction of expenditures, threatening households' food, and nutrition security.

The people most affected by COVID-19 are the poor in China. They are often vulnerable groups in society and mostly live in rural areas. The COVID-19 outbreak hit poor rural areas and brought economic activity to a standstill mainly because large parts of the country were under lockdown to contain COVID-19. These measures have made it impossible for some farmers to return to their lands for cultivation; rural migrant workers cannot return to work; rural industries are hampered, and marketing of agricultural products are adversely affected by disruptions in the supply chain. Some people who had already been lifted out of poverty are at risk of slipping back into poverty. They have limited access to social services, medical or social protection, and have less capacity to cope economically with the consequences of an outbreak. In this sense, the COVID-19 outbreak has threatened to undermine China's drive to end extreme poverty and would impact the completion of China's poverty alleviation plan this year.

2. China's efforts to achieve the goal of poverty alleviation

The economic slowdown due to the COVID-19 at the beginning of 2020 raises questions on whether China's goal of eradicating poverty by the end of the year is realistic and achievable. Despite this, China reaffirmed in May that she would deliver on its commitment to eradicate extreme poverty by the end of 2020. At the same time, China recognized that accelerating the return of China's economy to normal operation, and its increasingly robust is vital to the successful completion of China's goal as mentioned above. China has, at the macro-level of coordinating prevention and control with social and economic development, steadily resumed social and economic activities, to stabilize the six fronts (employment, finance, foreign trade, inbound investment, domestic investment, and market expectations), and guarantee the six priorities (jobs, daily living needs, food and energy, industrial and supply chains, the interests of market players, and the smooth functioning of grassroots government).

For example, China has adopted appropriate policies to ensure people's basic livelihood in difficulties caused by COVID-19. Key sectors providing food, pharmaceuticals, energy, basic industrial products, and public services essential to social stability and people's well-being are in normal operation, meeting the basic needs of people, including all people living in poverty.

China has adopted a series of policies that facilitate an order resumption of work. For example, State-owned enterprises have taken the lead in resuming operations, providing the impetus for upstream and downstream industries, including small and medium enterprises. China has taken a series of measures to reduce the burdens of businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises, and self-employed people. These include measures such as reducing fees and lowering taxes, increasing government subsidies, strengthening financial support, stabilizing and expanding employment, and improving government services.

Key groups such as college graduates and migrant workers are receiving support in finding jobs or starting businesses. Subsidies given to micro, small, and medium enterprises to reduce layoffs are extended to more businesses to stabilize employment and help them survive. China also associates employment creation with poverty alleviation, stepping up the efforts to achieve the elimination of all rural poverty. China prioritizes support for low-income laborers' employment and ensures that migrant workers in poverty-stricken areas can have steady employment.

Specifically, on poverty alleviation, China's overall strategy is: for the regions hit hard by the COVID-19, the task is to coordinate pandemic control with poverty alleviation. Meanwhile, areas with zero or fewer cases of infections have concentrated their strengths on expediting poverty relief. China has taken at least the following actions.

A nation-wide poverty alleviation survey was conducted to quantify the results and identify problems, and in particular, there was an in-depth and specific assessment of the impact of the epidemic on poverty alleviation efforts in the poorest areas; an implementation plan for poverty alleviation was formulated in the light of local realities. To ensure the authenticity and reliability of data on poverty alleviation, China has established an independent checking and inspecting mechanism, avowing that if there are any false reports or fraud, officials will be held accountable.

Now, work on some major national projects related to people's daily lives has resumed. Among them, many infrastructure projects that had been initiated to combat poverty, such as roads and streets and clean drinking water to the vulnerable, were reopened.

The strategy of consumption-driven poverty alleviation continues to progress steadily, with remarkable results. Sales of products from China's poverty-stricken areas have topped about 14.8 billion U.S. dollars this year. It is commendable that China supports the engagement of enterprises in poverty alleviation, particularly by encouraging the use of new and high technology, especially artificial intelligence (AI). AI technology could help level uneven distribution of resources and boost employment. Technology and e-commerce firms like Alibaba, have an important role in ensuring farmers can make the most of internet access. AI has also enabled schools in remote areas in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan provinces to access quality education resources, and the technology has brought assistive diagnosis and treatment tools to rural clinics.

Moreover, China is aware that one of the main challenges in the years after 2020 will be to reduce vulnerabilities and prevent people from sliding back into poverty. What China is doing now is making vulnerable populations more resilient to shocks and ensuring the long-term sustainability of poverty reduction achievements. China also plans to promote rural revitalization to help those who have been lifted out of poverty to prosperity.

Summary

COVID-19 is taking its toll on the world, causing deaths, illnesses, and economic despair. People who are already vulnerable are likely to be the most severely impacted, since they have less capacity to cope with the consequences of an outbreak, in terms of limited access to social services, medical care, social protection. It is thought that this Pandemic is pushing

about 40-60 million people into extreme poverty. However, this tale is not true in China. At the national level, the number of people living in extreme poverty in China has not increased dramatically as a result of the COVID-19.

China has set 2020 as a target to rid the country of poverty, but that goal has been thrown into doubt by the impact of the COVID-19. However, China has pledged that the goal must be realized as scheduled. At present, China's poverty alleviation tasks are near completion. More than that, China has rightly realized that eliminating "absolute poverty" does not mean that all poverty has been eliminated. On the contrary, China has admitted that there remains "relative poverty" since the concept of poverty exists under all circumstances. We are convinced that China will continue to bridge the development gap and achieve common prosperity.
