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Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council¹

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 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 200 countries and territories, we recognize the importance of investing in youth to achieve sustainable development.

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 center 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 people are given the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Food security and nutrition are an important part of that picture. Advances in agriculture have led to greater food production with less environmental impact, due largely to human ingenuity, all while population has continued to grow. Yet food insecurity and poor nutrition continue.

The problem cannot be reduced to numbers of people or mouths to feed. Population management programs categorize human beings, especially vulnerable populations, as burdens instead of essential participants in sustainable development. The premise that fixed resources and equitable distribution require fewer individuals is not only flawed but inconsistent with human dignity. Rather, WYA encourages the Commission to adopt policies grounded in the dignity of the person.

Person-centered development recognizes that human beings have inherent dignity that is not dependent on a particular time, place or situation. The freedom proper to human dignity cannot be compromised for economic or environmental goals, however laudable. Human beings are the subject of sustainable development and all population and development policies must be oriented around this principle.

Dignity offers 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 food, basic health care, education and vocational training, and good governance to ensure everyone has the opportunity to flourish. Policies that distract from this make persons an obstacle to development rather than its object.

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 equip people to be creative problem solvers. Just laws, institutions, infrastructures, and decent working condition enable people become agents of authentic development.

Our natural environment is 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 food as well as shelter, energy, water, sanitation, in a timely manner is crucial to preventing and reversing environmental degradation and ensuring our continued ability to meet the food and nutrition needs of all.

We must focus on responsible stewardship, which is the personal commitment to care for both earth and neighbour. 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 begins in the family and extends to both local and global communities.

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-centered 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.

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.

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. Maternal and reproductive health present a continuing challenge and particular concern in both developed and developing nations, and efforts should be made to promote knowledge-based healthcare for all. Controversial policies such as abortion should never be promoted as part of reproductive health programs or as requirements in programs designed to reduce poverty or food security.

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

The work of the Commission likewise cannot be achieved without good governance, including in ensuring the conditions that promote human flourishing. This is also reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 16, which highlights the importance of just societies and accountable institutions. Societies which are just and whose institutions are accountable are ones that ensure every person has access on an equal basis to various forms of capital, and therefore can thrive and contribute to development.

Michael Fairbanks, an advisor to President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, has identified seven forms of capital that people need access to in order to live a good life. These are: natural endowments such as location, subsoil assets, forests, beaches, and climate; the financial resources of a nation, such as savings and international reserves; humanly made capital, such as buildings, bridges, roads, and telecommunications assets; institutional capital, such as legal protections of tangible and intangible property, efficient government departments, and firms that maximize value to shareholders and compensate and train workers; knowledge resources, such as international patents, and university and think tank capacities; human capital, which represents skills, insights and capabilities; and culture capital, which means not only the explicit articulations of culture like music, language, and ritualistic tradition, but also attitudes and values that are linked to innovation. By ensuring that everyone has access to these forms of capital, we ensure sustainable development for everyone.

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 to ensure food security, nutrition, and person-centered development.
