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Statement submitted by Legião da Boa Vontade, 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Legião da Boa Vontade, a non-governmental civil society organization founded in Brazil in 1950, works in the areas of education, social development, sustainability, health and social communication. Every year, in approximately 100 units in seven countries in South America, North America and Europe, the organization provides more than 10 million services to families living in poverty.

This written statement presents the organization's recommendations regarding the theme of the 2013 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council, "Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals".

It is based on the best practices of the organization and the topics that were discussed during the multi-stakeholder panel on constructive cooperation coordinated by the organization during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012. The recommendations contained in this document are grouped into two main pillars: the first is on stimulating the social and environmental technologies produced by civil society and the second is on fostering new cultural and scientific paradigms for sustainable development. These topics aim to help Member States in their search for a response to the current challenges, which are aggravated by economic, political and environmental instabilities. All the practices mentioned have been successfully tested in civil society.

It is also important to emphasize the organization's vast experience in the field of information and communications technologies. This experience is the result of a radio programme created months before the organization was officially set up (on 1 January 1950) by its founder, Alziro Zarur, a renowned Brazilian radio broadcaster who was taking his first steps in the Brazilian Press Association. Over the following decades, the organization expanded its social communications framework to include other platforms (press, television, the Internet and alternative media). A successful story that utilizes this framework is the campaign "AIDS: the virus of prejudice assails more than the disease itself", the tagline of which was devised by the organization's president, the journalist and writer José de Paiva Netto. This particular movement became popular in the 1990s, when it brought together more than 200,000 people at a march in Rio de Janeiro. Currently, this life-affirming campaign reaches a vast number of individuals through social media. Among the partners of the initiative is the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS in Brazil, which has been sharing the message with its online followers since 2012. Even in Brazil, a country that is a model with regard to free access to antiretroviral drugs, prejudice and its social implications are still silently claiming many victims. However, this picture has changed and information and communications technologies have been extremely useful in bringing about this cultural shift.

A network of socioenvironmental technologies

Another theme disseminated by the organization through its media framework is the promotion of social or socioenvironmental innovations and technologies. In addition to being economically viable, such innovations have great social effects, for example on the expansion of productivity and the creation of jobs and decent work in urban and rural areas; the promotion of health and of food and nutritional

safety; increased accessibility for the disabled; and the reduction of environmental impacts and social inequity.

The organization has permanent slots in its media outlets aimed at disseminating these good practices. It identifies projects, networks, organizations and events that have a socioenvironmental focus and grants them visibility by encouraging their representatives' participation in major discussions at the national level and the development of new themes to be debated in civil society. Along the same line of action, another strategy of the organization is to participate in meetings of its network, which contribute to strengthening ties between entities. In 2012, with the partnership and participation of various organizations, eight Brazilian municipalities in four major regions of the country hosted events geared towards training administrators and social educators.

In São Paulo, for example, where this work has been carried out for several years, the entities have an individual register and monitoring process. The themes of the monthly meetings are chosen in accordance with their demands and the public's interest. Community leaders who are not familiar with digital platforms are trained to use the Internet. This knowledge, in turn, gives them autonomy, enabling them to "feed" information to the network's e-group, fostering partnerships between participating entities. The organization also supports a series of initiatives and events that are aimed at strengthening civil society in Brazil, including a platform that allows social administrators to be trained through the use of technological tools of distance learning.

These initiatives are coordinated within the scope of the Solidary Society Network, inspired by Paiva Netto's thesis from the 1980s, entitled "The solidary altruistic ecumenical society", which presents the model of society that the organization strives to achieve. Ecumenism, a topic that the author writes about, is not restricted to any particular religious aspect but rather has a global scope or applicability; it is universal. Thus, Paiva Netto states that it is urgent to strengthen the kind of ecumenism that overcomes barriers, appeases hatred and promotes an exchange of experience to instigate global creativity, thereby corroborating the value of partnerships, such as in popular cooperatives in which women play a strong role. This is the essential ethical principle driving activities in a network and a concept that has been preached by the organization since its foundation.

Constructive multi-stakeholder cooperation

The organization's Multi-stakeholder Forum and Solidary Society Network Innovation Fair, which has been held annually since 2004, brings together representatives from local authorities, the private sector and civil society in five Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) to debate advances, challenges and alternatives relating to the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals. Success stories and recommendations are subsequently submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its high-level segment. Since its first edition, the forum has counted on the support of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and of various entities of the United Nations system in the countries.

In 2012, a special edition of the forum was held, with a seminar on constructive cooperation. This high-level event, promoted within the context of the official programme of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development,

brought together representatives of the Brazilian Senate, the academic and business worlds and the Amazon region, all of whom are linked to the sustainability agenda. The role of science and technology in sustainable development was broadly discussed at the time.

Various ideas were suggested, such as the creation of an intergovernmental scientific panel or body, like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to monitor aspects related to the water cycle, the environmental and social impacts of energy production and other factors that are critical to global sustainability. This same body would also help to prepare and carry out long-term plans for the management of natural resources at the local and international levels. While discussing these plans, it was proposed that the participation mechanisms of civil society with Governments and parliaments be strengthened and that access to natural resources (like energy) for populations living in poverty who are today excluded from this right be prioritized.

Another proposal was to finance and transfer technology and training from developed countries to other countries, so that the latter can more efficiently develop while conserving natural resources. In this context, it was indicated that an effective strategy was to create the means for establishing “social enterprises” of various sizes. These enterprises would have to show that they can be self-sustaining and, at the same time, meet economic, social and environmental needs. An example of such enterprises are large-scale recycling cooperatives that employ people with disabilities from low-income communities.

Agents of a sustainable culture

Producing and disseminating socioenvironmental technologies also involves valuing cultures and the knowledge accumulated over thousands of years by both traditional and scientific communities. This is why Legião da Boa Vontade has, with the support of the people, built two monuments that are symbols of a gradual cultural shift towards greater harmony with sustainable development: the Temple of Good Will and the World Parliament of Ecumenical Fraternity (the organization’s ParlaMundi). Both are located in Brasília.

The past century has shown that technological innovation alone is not sufficient for achieving sustainability. A more in-depth review of the paradigms and values that have molded global society is necessary. The above-mentioned monuments, inaugurated in 1989 and 1994 respectively, aim to remind the global community of that need.

In addition to raising awareness, the monuments contribute to the organization’s efforts to advocate a culture of peace in all the communities in which it operates. In its schools, community centres for social assistance and homes for the elderly, the organization develops socioeducational classes and programmes in accordance with the specific social and cultural needs of those being helped. In each context, the organization values the cultural roots of every individual and his or her family, thus promoting the values of citizenship, ethics and ecumenical spirituality. Such efforts are part of the “good will pedagogy”, a teaching framework that guides all the actions of the organization and that comprises the “pedagogy of affection” and the “ecumenical citizen pedagogy”. It utilizes a teaching method that was developed by the organization’s own educators and is propagated by teachers in public and private teaching networks through lectures, workshops and an annual

congress. The method is tailored to each age group with the purpose of combining the pedagogical content with the experience of universal spiritual values.

Within this same teaching concept, the organization's communication channels produce and support the production of educational content that is presented and also made available in the form of teaching materials for socioeducational projects. Much of this material, in fact, is produced by former students of the organization in a permanent programme for training professionals in the audiovisual and multimedia areas; this is quickly becoming a technical school that specializes in social communication. This work contributes to the initiatives on all of the organization's educational and social fronts, in which children, young people and adults are trained to become advocates of sustainability.

This work has an even greater impact as communities become active agents themselves by continuing to promote and create conditions for everyone to become participants in the search for solutions for local problems, putting into practice what has been discussed.

Conclusions

As explained above, the organization believes that society globally can truly benefit from using, in a spirit of solidarity, current technologies, in particular socioenvironmental technologies, and that such technologies should receive more investment from Governments and society. The organization also emphasizes the need to engage in a more in-depth discussion on scientific practice and its values. This will help avoid research conducted through a purely economic and exclusionary lens, an approach that would only aggravate inequalities.

Paiva Netto stated that, in addition to relying on the power of reason, structural change must rely on the "best feelings of creatures", and that it is urgent to bring the mind and the heart into an alliance. He also stated: "By all means, gaze at the heights, but your feet should remain firmly on the ground".
