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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world

Statement submitted by Centre Africain de Recherche Industrielle (CARI), 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

Social development in the contemporary world should have become a moot concern, given the achievements of today's global civilization. Indeed, the great internationalization of economic and social life and our technical, scientific and social progress constitute an objective reality that testifies to humanity's grand conquests.

Mankind has made extraordinary technical progress, particularly when it comes to controlling the forces of nature. This progress has made available to civilization the fruits of a scientific and technical revolution that, by its scope and its degree, is beyond comparison with any scientific or industrial revolution of the past, and it could have been the basis for unprecedented social development. But alas, at the same time, humanity has been unable to counter the adverse consequences such as the emergence of thermonuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction; it is incapable of preventing severe disruptions of the natural environment, or of tolerating differences between people and their cultural underpinnings; skin color, religious practices, gender management, political regimes, historical features of the family, etc.

Some countries have many natural resources in copious quantities, while others have none or practically none. Intolerance and the refusal to accept differences between individuals and between peoples spark conflicts that in the end destroy all achievements and bring mankind constantly back to square one.

Compared to all previous periods of history, the 21st century has been marked by a social evolution of productive forces that has been extremely pronounced in all these aspects. And chief among those forces is man himself.

Let us begin by noting that as the year 2015 draws to a close, the world population has reached 7 billion, while over the course of the previous 30 centuries — in other words, since the beginning of our era — its growth amounted to only 1.2 billion people. Over the span of 15 decades, the world's industrial output has multiplied by a factor of around 15, marked moreover by profound qualitative changes: in the twinkling of an eye, by historical standards, mankind has mastered electric energy, and then atomic energy, it has fundamentally transformed its tools and means of production, it has learned to create new substances, some of which have properties programmed in advance.

For the first time since its origins, mankind has crossed the threshold of the cosmos, which it is now prospecting; it has penetrated the secrets of the oceans and made considerable progress in exploiting their riches. The automobile, the airplane, radio and television now offer unprecedented material possibilities for communication between individuals, countries and peoples.

The 20th century had already witnessed very important social changes, and it opened thoroughly new prospects by giving millions of people access to an active social life, to culture, and to the achievements of world civilization.

But alas, all these wonderful changes have yet to touch the lives of all peoples. In places where good governance is lacking, as in Africa, people are living in incredibly depressed circumstances: no access to basic services such as housing, food, water, electricity, health care, education, etc. — in short, poverty that can be classed as extreme. In the 21st century the situation is becoming steadily worse in

countries where democracy has not yet taken root. This is the case in African countries, particularly those south of the Sahara. Politics frustrates any attempts at social development. Bad governance is the rule for those who govern in complicity with the multinationals solely to preserve their interests, to the detriment of social development. If we do not take heed now, when we come to take stock of the sustainable development goals in 2030 we will find to our chagrin that most of those goals have not been achieved, especially those having to do with people and the planet.

In light of all the above, if we are to rethink and strengthen social development in the contemporary world we must advocate the culture of peace and the benefits of individual and national differences and, on this basis, champion solidarity between peoples and generations.
