Commission for Social Development
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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: “Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication”

Statement submitted by International Relations Students’ Association of McGill, 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

This statement is presented by the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation, a portfolio of the International Relations Students’ Association of McGill University. We are a youth-led non-governmental organization that has held consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2006. We engage with policymakers to ensure that decisions reflect the diverse perspectives and unique concerns of young people. Our mandate is to increase youth representation in policymaking by facilitating community consultations and collaborating with youth-focused NGOs. In this way, we provide a platform for young people to share their perspectives and concerns, ensuring their input is heard in international discussions and policies.

As we approach the 62nd Commission for Social Development, we want to emphasize the unique perspective that youth possess on this year’s priority theme: fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication. As long-term stakeholders, youth are often at the forefront of technological advancements, cultural shifts, and global interconnectedness, providing us with a nuanced understanding of contemporary issues. Furthermore, being directly impacted by long-term policy decisions, youth possess a vested interest in shaping policies that not only address immediate concerns but also contribute to sustainable and inclusive futures.

Amidst the policy development processes this year, we ask decision makers to uphold the importance of intersectionality. Intersectionality is crucial in addressing poverty because it acknowledges that individuals can face multiple layers of disadvantages and discrimination based on their various intersecting identities. These identities can include but are not limited to gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability, and more. By recognizing the complexities behind lived experiences, decision makers can develop comprehensive and effective policies to combat poverty.

In the face of unprecedented challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the eradication of poverty is not merely an aspirational goal; it is an absolute imperative. It is the linchpin that holds the key to accelerating recovery from the devastating consequences of the pandemic and, by extension, achieving the comprehensive realization of the 2030 Agenda.

Enhancing Education

Education can be a tool for marginalized communities to emancipate themselves from poverty. For education to break this vicious circle effectively, it must be equally accessible and adapted to the population’s needs. Inequalities in socioeconomic status can result in inequalities in access to education, which reinforces the previous dynamic.

Material conditions can hinder access to education since the opportunity costs of going to school are not the same for each and every individual. Immaterial conditions, or social status, must also be considered wisely when assessing these dynamics. Characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or disability can affect one’s access to education due to preconceived notions and discrimination. Therefore, it is paramount to promote universal access to education to counter socioeconomic disadvantages.

Furthermore, specific skills and competencies that are not formally taught in school are needed to have equal chances when entering the labor market. This is
notably the case for technological skills which are in growing demand in our digital age. But it can also apply to “softer” skills, such as interpersonal skills, which are implicitly needed to network and gain opportunities. These untraditional gaps are not yet properly addressed in education. Accordingly, it is necessary to address them by promoting an education adapted to its population’s needs.

Thus, we call upon commission partners to prioritize policies that:

- Encourage governments to provide universal access to primary and secondary education.
- Provide scholarships, grants, and financial aid programs for students from low-income families.
- Regularly collect data on educational outcomes with a specific focus on disparities based on income, ethnicity, and gender.
- Provide workshops on specific knowledge or skills needed to enter the workforce.
- Promote digital literacy and provides access to technology for all youths.

**Strengthening Social Institutions**

Social frameworks and institutions are foundational to the development of society. From protecting and supporting different groups to meeting society’s fundamental needs, they are implemented to push groups forward by promoting inclusivity and social justice. Individuals rely on these institutions to provide support, and to some, this support is paramount.

The inaccessible price of healthcare is especially detrimental to those who are unable to afford it, forcing many individuals to sacrifice healthcare for basic human needs. To many individuals, the lack of information provided to the public widens the healthcare gap. When untreated illnesses or misdiagnosis are discovered in later stages, they can be costly in terms of health and finances. Thus, it is imperative to implement information campaigns as measures to encourage populations to receive preventative care regular check-ups.

Vulnerable populations are at higher risk of financial strain and poverty because they tend to be isolated from regular society. Since they depend more on social welfare, it is necessary to provide adequate services to these groups in order to sustain an equitable society. It is therefore crucial to focus on strengthening these social safety nets for vulnerable populations through programs like targeted, unconditional cash transfer programs to alleviate the risk of poverty.

Individuals who are struggling to accord food are more likely to also be in a vulnerable position in terms of housing. The stability of having housing will further alleviate the financial stressors of being able to afford food on a day to day basis. Through proper government programs that can be implemented, individuals will be able to focus on their health and wellbeing. Therefore, it is critical to enforce housing programs to ensure the success of the overarching goal of poverty eradication.

To reinforce these points, we call upon commission partners to:

- Promote unconditional cash transfers and free food programs.
- Enforce policies that promote housing stability and rent caps.
- Implement policies on preventative healthcare.
- Promote regular assessments and adaptations of social protection policy.
Fostering Social Inclusion and Community Building

Social inclusion and community building embody fundamental principles of human rights and social justice, but most importantly are also essential to achieve sustainable and equitable development. Fostering social inclusion serves as an embodiment of the Commission’s commitment to leaving no one behind, as enshrined in the 2030 Agenda. It implies that every individual, regardless of their age, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, or any other characteristic, is able to participate actively in society and benefit from its advancements. To be most effective, this overarching goal should be implemented in every dimension of the economy, from promoting social inclusion in education to promoting it in the workplace.

Community building is intrinsically linked to social inclusion. Communities are the foundation for social bonds, shared values, and solidarity are nurtured. Strong and cohesive communities are essential for addressing various societal challenges, from providing social support to enhancing disaster resilience. Research has consistently demonstrated that strong community cohesion is associated with improved mental health, social cohesion, and by extension economic outcomes. The commission recognizes the intrinsic value of fostering communities that are inclusive, supportive, and resilient, as it promotes social harmony and bolsters the mental and economic well-being of their members.

By promoting social inclusion and community building, the commission takes a stride toward creating a world where every individual, regardless of their background, can fully participate in and benefit from the social, economic, and cultural advancements of their societies.

Therefore, we call upon commission partners to:

• Eliminate discriminatory laws and practices that perpetuate the social exclusion of marginalized groups
• Enact and enforce policies that promote diversity in education, workplaces, and government
• Encourage governments to provide access to basic resources such as education, healthcare, clean water, and sanitation to all communities
• Support the economic, political, and cultural participation of every community member through regional development programs, minority language recognition, universal franchise, and progressive taxation.