Commission for Social Development
Sixty-first session
5–14 February 2024
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 Passionists International 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

Passionists International is a network of religious communities and partners serving on all continents and in sixty countries. We strive to amplify the voices of those affected by all forms of poverty, inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and violence. We are committed to the care of all creation, the equality and empowerment of women and girls, the promotion of peace and reconciliation, and the building of socially just and resilient communities.

Our great concern is with persons who are marginalized from the benefits of society and experience many forms of exclusion due to both real and perceived lack of status and dignity, lack of access to the institutional supports provided by the society in which they live, and the denial of their human rights where societies fail to provide these supports or systematically exclude them. The right to dignity and a life without poverty is fundamental to human existence, ongoing human and societal development and flourishing. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, particularly Articles 22–30, speaks to those requirements to provide for a standard of living, social protections, means to right livelihoods and education, freedom to participate in the life of the community and the larger world, and that these rights cannot be destroyed. Moreover, it is the responsibility of nations to ensure that these basic human needs and rights are met, for all people, which is what the Member States of the United Nations have pledged to achieve via the Sustainable Development Goals and numerous treaties and conventions obligations that uphold human rights.

Though eradication of poverty has been a primary goal of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, we are drastically behind in achieving it, much due to a combination of lack of political will and the failure to address the many ways in which major and minority groups of people have been shut out or limited by societal norms and institutions that discriminate against them. People continue to be left behind. Gender disparities and systemic patriarchal attitudes and practices have long led to the feminization of poverty. People without basic amenities and income due to low-skill, educational level or other barriers to employment, become poorer. Those with fewer resources in general have less access to social pathways that increase income, status, or lead to chosen and stable livelihoods or pathways to increased skills. Systems block increased wages commensurate with skills and hours required, and commodity pricing leaves people literally out in the cold and unable to provide for their families. We have learned how inadequate our health care and social protections were during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that when increased cash and other supports were made available by Member States, it enabled many people to make ends meet. Despite this moment of a more caring economy, we quickly reverted to austerity practices, and refused to acknowledge and provide meaningful social protection floors. Instead, more countries could have seized this moment to energize or newly develop and implement national action plans that support people in true integral development that encompasses all aspects of social (and environmental) flourishing and sustainable development - and commit to financing them.

Only when States commit to a notion of Social Justice for all people and create accompanying policies and frameworks to achieve it, can the Sustainable Development Goals be realized. Without a vision the people perish, but without commitment and direct action it remains only a vision. Social welfare is about the well-being of society and each member in it – about the quality of human life in all its dimensions. Social Justice is a communal effort and commitment to create and sustain that quality of human life so that each person and all groups are valued, affirmed, and can live with dignity.
Yet all such efforts are undermined in the midst of war and conflict situations, which are so prevalent at this time and are causing tremendous and indiscriminate human suffering and long-term poverty of all sorts around the world. It is said throughout the United Nations that without peace there can be no development. Yet we fail to fully integrate this notion into our consciousness, and into our policies and practices in a way that could bring about real peace and true social justice, and in a way that could signify real and sustainable social development.

Throughout the world, we know that conflicts do not begin overnight. They grow and fester by years of injustice, by greed for power, by feeling the need to retaliate or to grow one’s own power in response to an oppressor. We see this when someone else controls our lives, our economies, our land, our movement, our access to basic services and what we need for life, and by the ways our lives and bodies are violated by horrific violence – sexual, physical, emotional, psychological. We see rape used as a weapon of war, and children, utterly exploited and traumatized by the violence around them and perpetrated against them. It can be perpetrated by armed gangs or by military forces, supposed peacekeeping forces, armed militias, illegal settlers, corporate or governmental land grabbers, enslavers, traffickers, etc. Wherever there is war or conflict, there will be sexual violence against women and girls, the violence of poverty, suffering and traumatization, the destruction of any forward development, and the killing of multitudes of innocent civilians.

We urge all Member States to take seriously the commitment to prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts as part of their sustainable development strategies via the inclusion of women’s peace and security teams, methods of diplomacy and mediation, national and global education for nonviolence, and to be instructed in models of processes of truth and reconciliation, which is the only true road to lasting peace. We urge all States to abide by international law at all levels, and to hold accountable all those who violate those norms or engage in war crimes and other crimes against humanity, via national courts and the International Court of Justice. People have a fundamental human right to security.

We urge Member States to strengthen their commitment to eradicate all forms and dimensions of poverty once and for all by listening to the voices of the people at the grassroots: engage in dialogue at all levels about their experiences, their needs, and the solutions they put forth – they know what is needed for the eradication of poverty and the achievement of true social justice. They must become full participants in the design and implementation of all such strategies. In light of the increased rates of poverty among women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabling conditions, ensure disaggregated data and multidimensional measures to accurately capture needs of populations so as to create effective solutions to address these gaps and empower individuals to flourish, and dedicate resources to accomplishing this.

Give close attention to the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and all other Expert Mechanisms and commit to analysis and application in national and local contexts as well as in the global community, to end poverty in all its forms and manifestations.

Implement the Women’s Peace and Security Agenda and commit to integrating education and practices of building peace and security in all societies, with special attention to prevention of sexual violence in conflict.

Eradicate the violence of poverty.