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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 MIGRANT OFFSHORE AID STATION (MOAS), 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

According to the most recent estimates, around 700 million people live in poverty and have an income of less than $2.15 a day. Poverty encompasses far more than the mere absence of income and the resources necessary for sustaining a viable livelihood. It is marked by hunger and malnutrition as well as restricted access to education and essential services while suffering social bias and exclusion. One must also not forget that poverty also entails having significantly hindered involvement in the decision-making process.

Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, perhaps the most important is that of eradicating poverty in all its manifestations. The SDGs’ main reference to combatting poverty is made in target 1.A: “Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions.” The SDGs also seek to establish robust policy frameworks at national and regional levels, founded on development strategies that prioritize the well-being of the underprivileged while remaining sensitive to gender disparities. These frameworks are designed to guarantee that by 2030, both men and women enjoy equitable rights to economic assets, as well as accessibility to essential services, land ownership, control over various forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, suitable innovative technologies and access to financial services, including microfinance.

Eradicating poverty is a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive approach involving various social policies and strategies, amongst these one will find:

a. Food assistance programs to ensure that people have access to nutritious food.

b. Universal healthcare to ensure that everyone has access to affordable healthcare services, and preventive health programs to promote health and wellness initiatives.

c. Targeted anti-poverty programs to address specific challenges faced by low-income communities and programs for early childhood education, nutrition and health to break the cycle of poverty.

d. Education and skills development programs to ensure that all children have access to quality education, from early childhood through higher education.

e. Economic development programs to invest in infrastructure projects that create jobs and stimulate economic growth in disadvantaged areas and to support the growth of local businesses to create employment opportunities.

f. Labor market policies to set a minimum wage that is sufficient to cover basic living expenses and to enforce laws that protect workers’ rights, including fair working conditions, job security, and collective bargaining.

g. Affordable housing for low-income individuals and families through subsidies, rent controls and support through grants as well as the provision of low-interest loans or down payment assistance.

h. Income support programs to ensure social assistance and financial support to children, individuals and families with low incomes or to people who lose their jobs.
Although the Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) does not deal directly with social policies, during these ten years it has contributed through its projects to alleviating poverty and promoting social development and social justice.

In August 2014, for the first time in history, MOAS launched a private Search and Rescue initiative into the central Mediterranean Sea to rescue migrants who risked losing their lives during their desperate attempt to reach Europe. 40,000 men, women and children have since been rescued by MOAS in the Central Mediterranean and the Aegean between 2014 and 2017. We aimed to address the lack of media attention and awareness of what was actually happening at sea. MOAS wanted to change this by informing civil society of the situation in the Mediterranean. That is why we shared our images and invited prominent media outlets onboard our vessel to document our SAR missions and to expose the shocking conditions of the people we were rescuing at sea. In doing so MOAS was responsible for a significant shift in the narrative which brought about greater worldwide attention to the crisis in the Mediterranean Sea and to the conditions that drive people to migrate. Since then, with the advocacy campaign for safe and legal migration routes, MOAS has highlighted the conditions of poverty and inequality in which many people live, with a particular focus on Africa and Asia.

In 2017, MOAS delivered humanitarian aid to Bangladesh. In the same year we established two Aid Stations, also serving as primary health centres, to serve the expanding refugee camps and their host communities. With the two Aid Stations located in the fishing village of Shamlapur and in the remote settlement of Unchiprang, our dedicated doctors, nurses, midwives and pharmacists treated over 90,000 Rohingya refugee and local people who would not have had access to the medical services they needed. When one considers the huge number of children living in the refugee camps, over 40% of our patients were under 18. During the Covid-19 outbreak, MOAS redirected its resources and programming to cope with the challenges posed by the pandemic with a Mask Making Project to assist in slowing down the spread of the virus through the overcrowded refugee camps and local communities. With support from IOM, we decided to transform our newly constructed workshop in Shamlapur into a production hub for the manufacturing of reusable, washable cotton face masks. This project also served as a livelihood for local host community workers, many of whom had lost their income due to the shutdown. Our team of local tailors (a total of 362, 115 female and 247 male) also included many working from home, to make this project more accessible and beneficial to the wider local community. Furthermore, all our materials for mask production were sourced from local businesses to further support the host community. The original goal was to make 350,000 masks independently and a further 500,000 with other partners, however final production greatly exceeded this figure.

In the same year, in Malta, along with continuing the provision of social and physical support to migrants receiving care at the local hospital and providing supplies to the government’s migrant support office for new arrivals, MOAS established a mask production initiative, with the intention of expanding the provision of protective measures for the many asylum seekers and refugees across the island, the majority of whom live in overcrowded conditions in the reception centers, a phenomenon that facilitated the spread of the virus. MOAS also delivered a Remote Learning Initiative in Malta providing tablets and modems with internet access to migrant families and students to help children and full-time adult learners keep up with their studies and the Family Hosting and Sponsorship Project to allow vulnerable migrants with an interest in furthering their education, to be matched with local families who are ready to offer accommodation and integration support. The aim is to boost integration through education in any possible way on the island.
The commitment to the eradication of poverty in the world has involved MOAS in Yemen, Somalia and Sudan with the delivery of several tonnes of nutritional aid and medical supplies specifically designed for children who are or are at high risk of being diagnosed as malnourished.

In Ukraine, the conflict has thrown millions of people into poverty depriving them of access to health services. Since February 2022, MOAS has treated more than 30,000 patients on the front line and thousand families and seniors in cut-off communities through care services and MMUs (Mobile Medical Units). More than 10,000 local health workers have been trained with state-of-the-art medical techniques and technologies to improve the overall health and well-being of the population.

Since its inception, MOAS has persevered in its mission of providing care to the most vulnerable. This is just a small contribution to the larger goal of eradicating poverty, but the path to achieving this goal is built on small steps and virtuous initiatives that, when combined, can together make gigantic strides.