



## Economic and Social Council

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### 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: promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all**

### **Statement submitted by Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America, 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.



## Statement

### **Access to safe drinking water and sanitation: essential to promoting empowerment of people, eradication of poverty, social integration and full employment and decent work**

E. F. Schumacher, in *A Guide for the Perplexed*, wrote:

On a visit to Leningrad some years ago, I consulted a map to find out where I was, but I could not make it out. From where I stood, I could see several enormous churches, yet there was no trace of them on my map. When finally an interpreter came to help me, he said: "We don't show churches on our maps" ... It then occurred to me that this was not the first time I had been given a map which failed to show many things I could see right in front of my eyes. All through school and university I had been given maps of life and knowledge on which there was hardly a trace of many of the things that I most cared about and that seemed to me to be of the greatest possible importance to the conduct of my life.

While reviewing documentation on the progress of implementation of access to safe drinking water and sanitation, with a view to supporting the social protection floor concept, it was difficult not to be reminded of the many idealistic writings published by the United Nations. The Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Global Compact, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development and, although not an official United Nations document, one nonetheless widely acclaimed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society, the Earth Charter, to mention just a few, are filled with moral and ethical values and concerns regarding the promotion of social justice and equity. They represent a world community respecting the very dignity of each human being, animal, plant and the Earth itself. The wording therein is both idealistic and well chosen to inspire and motivate the human community to take action to fulfil promises and commitments made. Yet, as NGOs and other members of civil society from the grass roots, especially from the developing world, testify, they do not see equal and full protection of human rights, access to safe water, sanitation, food and so many other promised elements of development that are necessary for meeting the basic needs of those living in poverty. This is a very perplexing situation. As the human race moves forward on Earth, the need for productive, meaningful cooperation and compromise among nations, Governments, institutions and peoples is urgent.

The concept of sustainability and its lack of incorporation, for the most part, into policies and the planning and implementation of development projects, including the Millennium Development Goals, has left the human family and our planet in precarious circumstances. According to the most recent report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation ([A/HRC/24/44](#)), about 1.8 billion people are estimated to lack access to safe water, 2.5 billion have no toilets, septic tanks, piped sewer systems or other means of improved sanitation and about 1.1 billion people still practise open defecation. It is to be noted that these figures vary depending on the collection method and source

consulted. That being said, according to the *UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS) 2012 Report: The Challenge of Extending and Sustaining Services*, there is a growing political will to implement water, sanitation and hygiene programmes, as expressed in new efforts to be more accountable and to plan and coordinate more effectively. Angola, the Gambia, Malawi and Rwanda are countries mentioned in the report for making the most progress in providing water and sanitation since 1995. According to self-assessment reporting for the establishment of policies and financing, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Oman, Rwanda, South Africa, Thailand and Uzbekistan have also been listed. These reports and others, covering different dimensions of the issues surrounding access to safe water and sanitation, are particularly timely in the light of the intense work currently being undertaken to formulate strategic goals for post-2015 sustainable development. Persons who lack access to safe water and sanitation remain excluded from the most basic opportunities for social integration and inclusion. Women and children are especially affected because they are most often required to gather the water for the family and, owing to this investment in time and energy, are denied the right to attend school and maintain employment. In addition, they often suffer from preventable waterborne diseases.

Several NGOs and members of civil society have endorsed the social protection floor concept of the International Labour Organization and have included not only universal social security, but also the provision, by right, of elements to meet basic needs, such as water, sanitation, food and housing. Services to be included in the social protection plan should be determined by listening to the voices of the people and be implemented by national Governments. Several countries have already implemented various services, such as universal health care, access to basic education and pensions. Thailand, with a population of 0.1 billion, is an excellent model of progress towards a nationally defined social protection floor. In 2010, according to International Labour Organization data, Thailand had a fragmented social protection floor in place. It focused on workers employed in formal sectors and civil servants. The poorer population had access to ad hoc means-tested programmes. Recently, however, Thailand announced a plan to expand the social protection floor based on national dialogue. The plan, a partnership between the United Nations within the United Nations Partnership Framework and the Government of Thailand, includes recommendations, cost estimates and policy and implementation issues in an effort to develop a comprehensive social protection floor for the country. The framework developed by Thailand could serve as a model for other Governments, affording opportunities for collaboration, cooperation and the fulfilment of promises made towards the eradication of poverty.

The United Nations Children's Fund, with the assistance of its many and reliable partners from the corporate and private sectors, has been able to extend water, sanitation and hygiene programmes to schools, towns and rural areas in many developing countries. Programmes in schools are ideal opportunities for initiating change that could have far-reaching effects, given that the children will learn and practise good hygiene habits with the advantage of having clean water and soap provided. Separate and safe latrine or toilet facilities for girls and boys have helped to keep girls from dropping out of school as they mature, stopping them from becoming easy prey or victims of violence owing to a lack of safety and privacy. Girls who complete higher levels of education will be more self-sufficient and will assist in raising the morale, overall quality of life and productivity of the family and

the entire population. The benefits of providing safe water and sanitation services are improved overall public health, reduced mortality rates and the elimination of some waterborne diseases entirely (allowing for more regular participation in schools and other education programmes), in addition to contributing to a more productive workforce. Food security and environmental stability will also increase.

We commend the efforts and progress made by Governments, United Nations departments and programmes and civil society to bring safe water and sanitation to developing countries and remote areas in some developed countries. Often, the barriers to be overcome are not recognized or appreciated by society. Customs and cultural traditions often prevent progress. From 1990 to 2010, according to UN-Water, 2 billion people gained access to safer drinking water and 1.8 billion received improved sanitation. In its above-mentioned report, UN-Water said that the principal challenge identified was to maintain focus on sustaining the water, sanitation and hygiene services already delivered. We are reminded of the global response to the need for financing for development expressed when Heads of State and Government met in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2002 at the International Conference on Financing for Development and set in place a multi-stakeholder process to facilitate the accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals.

In the light of the above challenges and the fact that the population is continuing to increase and water scarcity is becoming a major problem owing to greater competition for water by agriculture and industry, as well as falling water tables, we make the following recommendations:

- (a) People should be placed at the centre of development by being invited to be equal partners at the decision-making table;
- (b) Governments should fulfil commitments made in financial agreements, especially the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development. In addition, developed countries should adopt a financial transaction tax to garner additional revenue to support development in low-income countries;
- (c) Governments, partners and NGOs need to remain engaged in the long term;
- (d) The World Health Organization and other United Nations agencies should identify grass-roots leaders to be educated and trained, not only for leadership in gathering the voices of the people, but also to assist in the construction, maintenance, safety and operation of the water, sanitation and hygiene system. Materials for projects should be from the local area and projects built with the assistance of local workers, whenever possible;
- (e) NGOs and civil society need to advocate, urge and work with Governments to fulfil their obligations to formulate and follow through with policies that promote and maintain the human rights of their citizens to a life of respect and dignity through the adoption of a social protection floor that ensures that provision is made to meet the basic needs of all, without discrimination.

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*Note:* The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Dominican Leadership Conference, Partnership for Global Justice, Passionists International and Sisters of Charity Federation.