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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: strategies for the eradication of poverty to
achieve sustainable development for all**

Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, 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

The World Youth Alliance (WYA) is a global coalition of young people promoting the dignity of the human person in policy and culture, and building solidarity between young people of developing and developed countries.

Human dignity must be the foundation of our efforts

Human dignity is an essential element in developing policies that will lead to authentic development. The United Nations recognized this when the UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF) awarded WYA one of only eight global grants to train young leaders in the Middle East in human dignity. In doing so, UNDEF recognized the link between understanding human dignity and building just societies. When people understand human dignity, they seek to build societies where everyone can flourish. This is essential in ensuring that poverty eradication and sustainable development efforts truly do reach everyone.

This human dignity-centred approach is reflected in the principle that development must be person-centred. Every human being has human dignity. Therefore, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, we should “act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (Art. 1). It is the intrinsic worth of the human person that provides the basis on which to found policies and laws that create conditions under which human beings can flourish. Therefore we should respect every human being and work together in solidarity to ensure that every human being is included in our efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Empowering people to eradicate poverty and achieve authentic development

Development that is person-centred and grounded in human dignity focuses on empowering people. Policies based on human dignity recognize each person’s ability to contribute to, not just benefit from, development. Human creativity and hard work have driven innovation, improving living conditions for countless people. Policies grounded in human dignity prioritize basic health care (Goal 3), education and vocational training (Goal 4), and good governance and infrastructure (Goal 16) that will give people access to various forms of capital. Policies that treat persons as part of a problem to be solved rather than participants in development ultimately detract from these essential efforts.

Health and education equip people to participate in development efforts

Each person has a right to the highest attainable standard of health. Health affects individuals’ participation in the work and social spheres. Poor health can detract from the ability to receive an education and hurt one’s ability to participate in the workforce and the life of the community.

Good health requires not only medical care, but also clean water, sanitation, good nutrition, psychological well-being and the education necessary to comprehend medical advice and make informed decisions. Vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities and conflict-affected populations are disproportionately affected by lack of access to healthcare and education. Therefore they deserve responses that meet their needs and enable them to participate fully in the life of society.

Human dignity must be at the foundation of healthcare. People need to be able to understand their bodies and their options in order to exercise informed consent. They should not be denied healthcare based on considerations such as race, class, or disability status. And all treatments and services must respect the values and dignity of all human beings. World Youth Alliance encourages Member States not to impose healthcare products and procedures that fail to respect patients' consciences or which violate human dignity. Controversial practices such as abortion violate the dignity of mother and child and should not be promoted as a way to eradicate poverty.

Quality education must be available to all on an equal basis and should flow from an authentic understanding of the human person, and foster respect for self and others in solidarity. The primary responsibility of education rests on the parents and it is the obligation of the State to support them in this role.

World Youth Alliance has developed a curriculum that can help promote respect, responsible behaviour, and equality. The Human Dignity Curriculum (HDC) teaches children about human dignity: that every human being has it, and should therefore be respected. It also teaches children that, regardless of their circumstances, they have the potential to be excellent, to develop their gifts, and to use these gifts for the common good. The HDC is culturally sensitive and encourages parental involvement.

Young people who understand human dignity are not only prepared to make responsible personal decisions, but to contribute to their communities and to treat others with respect in their families, peer groups, and communities, including in their personal relationships. They will be prepared to contribute to sustainable development and poverty eradication, not just for themselves, but for others.

Access to various forms of capital empowers people to achieve authentic development

Having good health and sufficient education are not the only things people need to achieve development and poverty eradication. In order to truly empower people, we must ensure that they have access to the various forms of capital. This is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 16, which highlights the importance of just societies and accountable institutions. Societies which are just and whose institutions are accountable are ones that ensure every person has access on an equal basis to the fundamental forms of capital.

Michael Fairbanks, an advisor to President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, has identified seven forms of capital that people need access to in order to live a good life. These are: natural endowments such as location, subsoil assets, forests, beaches, and climate; the financial resources of a nation, such as savings and international reserves; humanly made capital, such as buildings, bridges, roads, and telecommunications assets; institutional capital, such as legal protections of tangible and intangible property, efficient government departments, and firms that maximize value to shareholders and compensate and train workers; knowledge resources, such as international patents, and university and think tank capacities; human capital, which represents skills, insights and capabilities; and culture capital, which means not only the explicit articulations of culture like music, language, and ritualistic tradition, but also attitudes and values that are linked to innovation.

Institutional capital aligns closely with Goal 16, and is critical to ensuring the access to the other forms of capital. In countries where corruption is widespread, the poor often cannot afford to exercise their rights. Those with inadequate or overbearing regulations make it impossible to start new enterprises, often leading to concentration of power and wealth. A lack of good infrastructure inhibits successful entrepreneurship. And the poor and vulnerable will suffer the most due to these problems.

However, countries that invest in just and accountable institutions and good infrastructure management can bring about lasting change. Eliminating bribery puts more people on an equal footing. Regulatory schemes that are reasonable and intelligible to the ordinary person can protect resources from misuse while guaranteeing access to those resources by anyone with a good idea and the willingness to work for it. Creating systems that are just and accountable will increase their use by those most likely to be excluded. This is essential to eradicating poverty and ensuring sustainable development for all.

Conclusion

Human beings are our greatest resource. As the world of work continues to grow and change it is important to ensure that we include all people in all spheres of life. By grounding our efforts in human dignity and building person-centred policies, we can equip all human beings to be problem-solvers. Therefore, we urge the Commission to promote policies based on human dignity which ensure that all people have access to healthcare, quality education, and just and accountable institutions to ensure that they have access to the various forms of capital by which they can contribute to sustainable development and poverty eradication.
