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**Population and sustainable development, in particular
sustained and inclusive economic growth**

Statement submitted by the World Youth Alliance, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council¹

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.

¹ The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The World Youth Alliance is a global coalition of young people dedicated to the promotion and defence of human dignity in policy and culture and building solidarity between young people in developing and developed countries. With over 200,000 individual members in more than two hundred countries and territories, we recognize the importance of investing in youth to achieve sustainable development.

After having spent over a year and a half entrenched in a global pandemic, how do the young people of the World Youth Alliance view the possibility of sustained and inclusive economic growth in the years to come? We take as our starting point the conviction that human beings are the world's greatest resource, and that human creativity is a natural catalyst for development. For this reason, the World Youth Alliance calls for building societies that have a deep respect for human dignity, that help families thrive, and that place the economy at the service of people and not vice versa.

Future sustained and inclusive economic growth is tied to respect for human dignity. In 2017 the World Youth Alliance launched its Human Dignity Curriculum (HDC) for children ages 5–18. This curriculum teaches that every human being, from conception to natural death, has dignity that must be respected. The Human Dignity Curriculum 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 of all. Human dignity education programs, like this one, give children a strong foundation which fosters attitudes of resilience. Children become aware that global emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crises, natural disasters and general uncertainty do not have the last word. They learn that they can be change makers and heroes in their communities.

Though individuals are the protagonists of sustained and inclusive economic growth, resilience is not merely cultivated through the foundation of human dignity education. The World Youth Alliance also believes that resilience grows in environments that value families and create the conditions for them to thrive. The family is the core unit of society. Therefore, it is concerning to see that the fertility rates of over half of the countries in the world have dropped below replacement levels over the past few years.

More countries are launching pro-natalist policies because predictions of a future without children are grim. Economically, countries need a large young workforce to stimulate their economies and pay into social security programs to care for growing elderly populations. Socially, the natural gender ratios in countries with a history of sex-selective birth preferences have become skewed. Some increasingly male-dominated societies are seeing an increase in sex-trafficking and forced marriages, usually targeting women from neighbouring countries. Politically, shrinking societies lose their global influence and, culturally, they lose the ability to carry on their traditions and to preserve their collective memory. In fact, data from the 2019 UN World Population Prospects showed that two thirds of the countries in Europe and half of those in Latin America and the Caribbean, a total of ninety countries, are expected to see a decrease in population by 2100.

The members of the World Youth Alliance call for encouraging family-friendly societies, as these form the individuals that will ensure that development is sustainable, and that economic growth is inclusive. The world needs policies that address some of the biggest problems facing families with working parent. These include targeted support for working parents and for pregnant women, as well as the expansion of childcare initiatives and maternal and paternal leave. However, these policies alone will not easily undo cultural attitudes that were cultivated amidst strict

population programs and policies in the 20th century, which developed greater reservations towards having children.

Promoting person-centred solutions is another way the World Youth Alliance proposes to achieve sustainable development and inclusive economic growth in the future. Governments' efforts for social planning aimed at purely economic purposes relegate people to the margins and use them as a means to an end. They ignore human freedom and evaluate people's decisions based on financial outcomes. Yet, the economy exists to serve human flourishing and not vice versa. Policy makers must recognize human beings as much more than just consumers.

In her "Doughnut Economics" theory, Kate Raworth points out that previous economic models that only ascribe humans the identity of consumers fail to grasp human complexity: we belong to families, to communities, and we have a political identity. Therefore, sustainable development and inclusive economic growth cannot be achieved through one-size-fits-all programs. Unique person-centred solutions are necessary.

People and their labour determine market dynamics and the long-term advancement of the efficiency of production. Yet improving GDP and market gains cannot be the sole priority of governments nor the marker of their success in achieving sustainable development and inclusive economic growth. Developing resilient and innovative human capital, recognizing individuals' skills, insights, and capabilities is an essential factor.

Human dignity offers clear criteria for identifying development policies that will lead to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals. Policies should focus on creating conditions for human flourishing by prioritizing food, basic health care, education and vocational training, and good governance to ensure everyone has the opportunity to flourish. The World Youth Alliance observes a significant underestimation of the value of marginalized groups. Indigenous peoples, refugees, persons with disabilities, and many other communities have great potential to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and inclusive economic growth.

The members of the World Youth Alliance call upon Member States to prioritize human dignity, family, and person-centred solutions. Doing so puts countries on the correct path to achieving sustainable development and sustained, inclusive economic growth. A universal recognition and respect for human dignity can be cultivated by means of human dignity education, using programs such as the World Youth Alliance's Human Dignity Curriculum. Countries must support families, in part through policy, but also by means of developing a culture that has a positive outlook on childbearing and rearing. Finally, countries must put in order their priorities, remembering that the economy serves the human person in all his or her uniqueness and complexity and not vice versa.

Human beings and their creativity are the world's greatest and most sustainable resource. We, the members of the Word Youth Alliance, call on Member States to remember and celebrate and this.