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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: rethinking and strengthening social  
development in the contemporary world**

### **Statement submitted by Dominican Leadership Conference and UNANIMA International, non-governmental organizations 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **Climate Change and its Impact on Social Development Today**

#### Introduction

Whatever the primary advocacy focus — disabled persons, aged, youth, family, or indigenous peoples — climate change stands in the way of successful outcomes, posing a great threat to the social fabric of a nation, its economy, and its people. In the April 2015 United Nations (UN) report, “The Effects of Climate Change on the Full Enjoyment of Human Rights,” UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, John Knox, with four other rapporteurs, referred to climate change as a major threat to human rights.

Just a few years ago, Syria experienced a multi-year drought. Rural people fled to cities, social instability ensued, and civil war broke out. The country and its people were devastated by war, resulting in internally displaced persons and a global migration crisis, with all the poverty, death, and human suffering that ensue. The interaction of the three “dimensions” of the post-Rio dialog is being dramatically illustrated as this crisis plays out.

The objective of this statement is to show how integral the reality of climate change is to social development issues, to offer some examples, and to provide recommendations. The Expert Group Meeting (July 2015) in preparation for the 54th Commission for Social Development noted that the contexts and prioritization for social development are shifting, and it specifically noted that climate change and its intensifying negative impacts are among those shifting contexts which need to be taken in account in rethinking social development. The intersections that need to be strengthened between the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development include the interaction between climate change and food, energy, and water insecurity, and their social impacts.

The E-Dialog held in preparation for the 54th Commission for Social Development made the link between widening inequality, persistent poverty, and food/water insecurity, with environmental factors like the intensified effects of climate change. It called for a holistic approach, breaking down of silos, and a paradigm shift in the way policy strategists are beginning to approach social development. The impact of environmental degradation on social wellbeing has been increasingly recognized as a new trend and challenge. The E-Dialog said, “This has had a direct impact on the way social policy is conceptualized in relation to environmental policy, in particular with a more robust understanding of the impacts of climate change on groups and societies.”

#### Overview of how climate change relates to our NGOs

The social development issues that form the core of our two NGOs’ advocacy efforts include water and climate change, especially as they relate to women and children; people living in poverty; people who are trafficked; and migrants/refugees.

Climate change impacts all these areas, with drought or flooding, displacement, increased poverty, and mass migrations. Women and children are the face of poverty and those most often trafficked. Women and children often suffer most from the nightmare of being a refugee or migrant. In developing countries they are the ones

who carry the water, and whose lives are disrupted the most from lack of sanitation. Poverty and migration increase trafficking as desperate families try to give their children food, so all these areas are interrelated.

#### Voices from the grassroots

Besides our NGOs' members caught up in the Syrian crisis, those in other countries are describing the suffering caused by the intensifying storms resulting from climate change, and their effect on families, the disabled, aged, young, and people living in poverty.

One of our member groups in Sri Lanka reported on the experience there after the Tsunami of 2004 devastated the country. Displaced families from the beaches of Negombo were given temporary shelter at a school run by a religious organization. In search of a long-term solution for safe housing away from the coastline, two NGOs worked with the government to create Boscopura, a large housing complex that provided safe lodging for needy families displaced by the tsunami.

However, the people no longer had easy access to their traditional livelihood of fishing. The beaches of the fisher folk became a hive of activity for the drug trade, gambling, and prostitution. Though free basic education was provided for the children, the reputation of Boscopura (built next to a cemetery, on a former landfill) and the lack of official certification for the school made it hard for the children to get into good schools later. The children began dropping out of school and working in garment factories instead of their traditional way of life, and unemployment was the norm among adults. Some of the men left to fish on other islands. Families were broken up. The property did not feel like home ("It feels like jail," said one); since it did not belong to them, they did not take care of it, and it was noisy, unpleasant, and unsanitary. A way of living and working was lost for the people of Boscopura.

One of the effects of climate change is the increase in the number and intensity of storms. Another country severely impacted by the changing climate is the Philippines. Currently half a million people in the Philippines are recovering from Typhoon Koppu's devastation; that was the twelfth storm in 2015 in a country constantly threatened by flooding, landslides, and damage to local infrastructure. Whole hillsides are still falling into abandoned mine tunnels. According to our grassroots sources, it is becoming increasingly hard to find the resilience to deal with one storm after another, though they are learning more about the emergency responses needed.

What we learn from this is that people on the ground can teach us valuable lessons of what works and does not work. People must be included in policy development. When countries face environmental devastation, charitable NGOs can offer on-the-ground experience and knowledge of the social structures and culture of the people involved. The scientists, engineers, and economists more equipped to deal with long term solutions to global issues like climate change must take into account social factors and traditional ways. Economics, environment, and social/cultural structures must all contribute to permanent solutions to global realities like climate change. Any solution will have to deal with issues of microeconomy, history, culture, tradition, and continued environmental change.

### Recommendations

We urge member states to consider the following:

- (a) Follow the Expert Group Meeting recommendation to strengthen the linkage between the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.
- (b) In planning national adaptation strategies to climate change, take into account the interactions between climate change and food, energy, and water insecurity and their social impacts.
- (c) In policy development, link climate change with inequality, poverty, and food/water/energy insecurity.
- (d) In aid development plans, give priority to prevention and resilience for countries vulnerable to severe storms and climate events.
- (e) Involve local and indigenous people in plans for their country's adaptation and permanent resettlement solutions.
- (f) Sustainable Development Goal #13 on climate change should be integrated in all major social action plans and policies.

### Conclusion

The Commission for Social Development has been a champion for the most vulnerable since 1946. The most vulnerable suffer most from the effects of climate change. NGOs who find their United Nations home under the banner of social development are concerned that the social dimension is often not given the attention that it deserves. In this regard, we were greatly encouraged by the words of Pope Francis to the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. The Pope spoke of “broad sectors which are vulnerable, victims of power badly exercised: for example, the natural environment and the vast ranks of the excluded. These sectors are closely interconnected and made increasingly fragile by dominant political and economic relationships. That is why their rights must be forcefully affirmed, by working to protect the environment and by putting an end to exclusion”. When the three dimensions of development are better integrated, the social dimension will be strengthened, and no one will be left behind. The issue of climate change just might be the catalyst that enables deeper integration.