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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 International Movement ATD Fourth World, 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

Introduction

Despite real progress in eradicating poverty in some regions in the past years, 22 per cent of people in developing countries are still living on less than \$1.25 a day and 43 per cent on less than \$2 a day. Despite all the efforts made for poverty eradication through the United Nations development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals, there is now evidence that we are failing to reach the most vulnerable, who have been historically, and remain at present, most affected by both environmental degradation and social and economic exclusion. Furthermore, many development policies and projects have not had the desired impact, and many have contributed to the isolation of and displaced the most vulnerable populations.

In this context, we welcome the focus of the fifty-first session of the Commission of Social Development on the theme “Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all”. Empowerment, when it creates the conditions for effective and meaningful participation, is an affirmation of the right of every individual and group to take part in the conduct of public affairs. It is also a means of promoting social inclusion and an essential component of efforts to combat poverty, not least by ensuring that public policies are sustainable and designed to meet the expressed needs of the poorest segments of society.

Challenges for promoting people’s empowerment: a perspective from excluded and disadvantaged populations

What does empowerment mean when one is neither recognized nor treated as a human being?

The true dimensions of poverty have been trivialized, often being described solely in terms of lack of food, income, housing and access to health and education. Consequently, many policies and programmes have been ill adapted to the needs and realities of those living in extreme poverty.

When one is placed in a position of understanding and learning from persons living in such conditions, another reality emerges: the material deprivation suffered by those living in extreme poverty condemns people, families and whole communities to mere survival. It condemns them to focus always on immediate concerns and prevents them from thinking about or preparing for the future; renders them unable to provide their children with quality food, education and belongings; forces them to live in dangerous places; and pushes them into making impossible choices. It separates families and forces them to compete for resources that are always in too-short supply. It makes them live with fear, physical and psychological exhaustion, pain and guilt, in silence.

In a contribution to the organization’s international seminar in Grand Baie, Mauritius, one participant identified the lack of hope as the worst thing about poverty. The participant described it as worrying about the day’s meal every morning upon waking up, not knowing where the next day’s meal would come from and feeling helplessness to do anything for one’s children. She added that when the following day came, the whole thing just started all over. She believed that the

reason why people in poverty died at a young age was the knowledge that even if she got her children through the day, the whole cycle would begin again; she felt that there was no hope at the end of it.

Those living in extreme poverty are not only faced with the problems of deprivation and poor access to services. Equally problematic are the humiliation, lack of respect and contempt that they face on a day-to-day basis. At its most extreme, this can be seen as a form of violence, an attack on their identity as a member of society or of the community and a denial of their individual humanity. In short, it is a refusal to treat those already suffering from severe material deprivation as human beings.

In a contribution to the organization's international seminar in Lima, one participant noted that the worst thing about living in extreme poverty was the contempt: being treated as if one was worthless, being looked at with disgust and fear and even being treated as an enemy. The participant added that this was her family's experience every day, along with the accompanying hurt, humiliation, fear and shame.

Generating knowledge with people living in extreme poverty

The knowledge generated to formulate, implement and evaluate policies and programmes to eradicate poverty, promote social integration and create decent work for all has been partial and has been generated without taking into account the knowledge that people living in extreme poverty for generations have. Furthermore, because it has failed to take into account the real dimensions of extreme poverty and instead has focused excessively on statistics and language that have trivialized the suffering of the people, it has contributed to the disempowerment and silencing of the most vulnerable.

Empowerment cannot happen without a collective and sustained effort to enable each person to speak out in order to further our comprehension of the reality of extreme poverty. It is essential to understand how to create the conditions for breaking this silence in order to create the meaningful engagement necessary with the most marginalized people and populations before programmes and projects can make an impact on the eradication of poverty.

People living in extreme poverty should have a meaningful presence throughout the entire process of elaborating knowledge. This should involve not only allowing them to give testimony of their own experiences but also encouraging them to contribute their own thoughts and analysis individually and collectively through the whole process of creating the knowledge that will shape the policies and programmes to eradicate poverty, promote social integration and create decent work for all.

Empowering people also requires a commitment on the part of those in a position of power or authority to recognize the knowledge possessed by those who have had silence imposed on them and to have the will to pool this knowledge with their own and, in the process, create "new knowledge" that will transform institutional practice and the lives of people living in extreme poverty. It is the elaboration of this new knowledge that is essential to successfully eradicating poverty and social exclusion.

Proposals for ways forward to work towards eradicating extreme poverty through empowerment and participation

An enabling environment for empowerment and participation

Creating the conditions for the meaningful participation of people in extreme poverty in all areas that affect their lives is effective in promoting empowerment only if an enabling environment exists for the respect, protection and fulfilment of their fundamental human rights.

The guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights (A/HRC/21/39), recently adopted by the Human Rights Council, provide a practical tool for policymakers that will guide States in designing their public policies, particularly their poverty eradication efforts, on the basis of a human rights-based approach. Based on international human rights norms and values, the principles provide guidance on the application of States' human rights obligations in the fight against extreme poverty. They highlight the specific rights whose enjoyment by persons living in poverty is particularly limited and obstructed and in relation to which State policies are often inadequate or counterproductive. The relevance of their content to people in extreme poverty is a reflection of the numerous consultation exercises carried out throughout their drafting, including with the most vulnerable and marginalized populations in both the global North and South.

Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015

In the coming months the United Nations will define its development agenda and will agree on the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. In view of the failure of many anti-poverty programmes to reach the "bottom billion" since the Millennium Development Goals were adopted, it is clear that the knowledge and experience of the people most affected by extreme poverty are crucial in assessing the impact of the Goals on their communities to date. International Movement ATD Fourth World is carrying out a participatory action-research project with a view to providing people living in extreme poverty with the means to contribute their experience and knowledge to evaluate the Goals and delivering proposals concerning how policies and programmes can be conceived, implemented and evaluated with people living in extreme poverty.

Implementing the International Labour Organization recommendations on social protection floors

The implementation of International Labour Organization Recommendation No. 202 concerning national floors for social protection will ensure that all individuals, including the most vulnerable, receive a basic level of social protection that would enable them to better cope with unemployment and shocks in formal and informal labour markets. We are convinced that the rights-based approach to social security and social protection is the most effective way to ensure the fulfilment of a person's right to an adequate standard of living, eliminate marginalization and exclusion and create the conditions necessary for access to decent work for all.