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Written statement* submitted by Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 February 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



On Social Forum 2020

Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23) participated in the Social Forum 2020 that focused on “Good Practices, Success Stories, Lessons Learned and Current Challenges in Combating Poverty and Inequalities” and would like to contribute to the debate with a point of view deriving from its experience on the field in more than 40 countries worldwide.

COVID-19 has transformed our societies, disrupting economies, communities, families and individuals. The pandemic has shown that the whole of humanity is interconnected, North and South can no longer be seen as separate realities. Moreover, we have to face not only a health issue, but also a complex political, social, economic, cultural and global phenomenon.

APG23 believes that the pandemic has taught the importance of health as a common good and the value of a public health system. Health, being a fundamental right, and universal health coverage are key components for the Sustainable Development Goals. That is why APG23 advocates for equal access to treatment for COVID-19 including universal distribution of vaccines considering the circumstances of the least developed countries and for the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights flexibility regime based on the concern of Public Health as a priority. Moreover, it is necessary to revisit the global institutional architecture and recommit to multilateralism, for it is needed to address global risks and achieve the 2030 Agenda, including combating climate change. We call not solely for a wider international cooperation, but also for the cancellation of the external debt for those countries that are dramatically affected by the economic challenges stemming from the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to attain the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

APG23 believes that the right to development is powerful and revolutionary in addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), since it aims to remove the deep-root causes of poverty and inequality. Many of the structural obstacles that impede development are still to be removed. As suggested by Pope Francis, there is a need to overcome the current economic paradigms and forge new economic models that are sustainable, people-centred, and inclusive¹. States need to reduce their military expenditures with the redirection of the released resources towards social protection initiatives, health system strengthening and achievement of the SDGs. As already stated, it is urgent to cancel the debt of the least developed countries. Every dollar in debt servicing that goes to repay a bank is a dollar that cannot go to buy a ventilator or emergency food support. Moreover, it is necessary to strengthen the regulation of the global financial markets and institutions where the voice of developing countries needs to be guaranteed in the decision-making to make the financial institutions more accountable and legitimate.

At the same time, the community engagement is likewise crucial in adopting a human rights-based approach to fighting poverty and reducing inequalities. It is a change of paradigm: policies and programmes are not developed “for” someone but “with” someone, and a real ownership of development processes is promoted. As an example, we would like to briefly share the experience of Rainbow Project, a multisectoral model of intervention promoted by APG23 since 1998 (in Zambia, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania) with the aim to promote and enhance community engagement in delivering concrete actions to protect orphans and vulnerable children and fulfil their rights. The model acts as a network of community-based responses, mobilizing and coordinating different local organizations at community level.

Furthermore, the crisis created by the pandemic is a great opportunity to reaffirm the role of the States, and to put into action brave and innovative policies focused on environmental and social issues. The crisis finally broke useless dogmas, such as the priority of economic

¹ <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/mondo/news/2020-01/nuova-economia-giovani-assisi-papa-luigino-bruni.html>.

growth and the capacity of markets alone to provide a good quality of life and happiness for humanity. The taboo of rethinking the role of States and economics, boosting a public, political and economic system that serves the common good, has finally been broken. A window of opportunity is now open: States should focus on creating an enabling environment at national and international level to foster and promote the capacity of all stakeholders to combat poverty and to empower persons living in poverty to claim their rights.

APG23 would like to conclude reiterating that we need to rethink political choices prioritizing the most vulnerable, protecting societies from extreme inequality, putting the dignity of every human being at the centre and providing proactive and systemic responses to protect the population. Governments have to implement new economic models that consider sustainability and the voices of people in poverty, and they have to promote a balance between human needs and planetary boundaries. We have to support policies in the service of the common good, capable of overcoming financial interests, selfishness and market logic based on profit and the culture of waste. Inequality and extreme poverty should be addressed through a human rights-based approach.

As Pope Francis says in the Encyclical letter on the Fraternity and Social Friendship: “Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter”². In a pluralistic society, dialogue is the means by which society identifies those truths that must always be affirmed and respected. It is necessary to form a pact between all members of society, rich and poor, which exhorts everyone to give up some things for the common good. For this reason, we insist in the need of giving a legal dimension to international solidarity by recognizing it as a right and to finalise and approve as soon as possible a treaty on the right to development.

² Encyclical letter Fratelli Tutti, Holy Father Francis on the Fraternity and Social Friendship. Par 215.