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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), 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.

[06 September 2013]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Eradicating extreme poverty

IASSW feels that extreme poverty “shocks the conscience of humanity” as asserted in the Preamble in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is a gross and massive violation of human rights. Select data are that roughly 1.4 billion people globally go to bed hungry each night, some from developed countries. More than 80% of the world’s population lives in countries where income differentials are widening. Indeed, the wealthiest nation on earth, the USA, has the widest gap between rich and poor of any industrialized nation. The poorest 40 percent of the world’s population accounts for 5% of the world’s income; the richest 20% accounts for three quarters of world income. According to UNICEF, 22,000 children die each day due to poverty who “die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world. Being meek and weak in life makes these dying multitudes even more invisible in death.” Roughly 28% of children in developing countries, most notably South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, are underweight or stunted seriously questioning whether the Millennium Development Goals target of having the proportion of underweight children will be missed by 30 million children. Nearly a billion living today cannot read a book or sign their names. Infectious diseases continue the blight of the poor with an estimated 40 million living with HIV/AIDS and 500 million cases of malaria.

Access to clean and potable water, also affect roughly half of humanity. 1.1 billion in developing countries have inadequate access to water and roughly 3 billion lack basic sanitation, the majority of those living on less than \$2 per day. The nearly 2 billion in developing countries who do have access to water within 1 kilometer of their house consume 20 litres per day, whereas those in developed countries like the United Kingdom consume an average of 150 litres daily and in the USA consume the highest average of 600 litres per day. There are indeed massive economic wastes associated with water and sanitation deficit pertaining to health spending, productivity loss and labor diversions. Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, loses about 5% of their GDP in that regard or \$28.4 billion annually.

There are approximately 500 billionaires, that is, .000008% of the world’s population who were worth an estimated \$3.5 trillion; there are 2.4 billion people in low-income countries that account for \$1.6 trillion of the GDP. 51% of the world’s 100 hundred wealthiest bodies are corporations. For every \$1 spent in aid in developing countries, \$25 is spent on debt repayment. Just 1% of what the world spent on weapons could effectively be used to put every child into school, a scenario which has never happened. (Data for the above is from <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats>)

But it is not just statistical data that recall to mind “the world’s most pitiless killer” as asserted by UNICEF. It is also the “lived suffering” of those in extreme poverty. They may be under constant threat of losing their homes; unsure where their next meal is coming from; lying homeless, barely clothed in frigid weather; constantly dealing with health problems throughout their lives that could have been prevented; and/or are victims of environmental catastrophe. A case in point is the voice of a 15 year old Michelle Collins who during Hurricane Katrina stated: “While walking to the Superdome, there was water almost all the way up to our stomachs. We saw a lot of people just dying... it was terrible. It was like a hospital mixed with hungry people... people getting raped and hurt. We were sleeping on the floor and it was wet... I didn’t know where my mom was. Not until eight months or a year later, I was able to communicate with her.” (ATD Fourth World Movement, 2012, *Not Meant to Live Like This*, pp. xiv.)

As a way out of this global pogrom, IASSW asks all governments in concert with all structures of civil society, such as NGO’s, businesses, financial, and educational institutions

to endorse and implement the Final Draft of the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, submitted by the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda-Carmona on July 18, 2012 before the 21st session of the Human Rights Council, under agenda item 3 on the protection of all human rights: civil and political; economic, social, and cultural; and the right to development.

We feel that progress has been made by governments' commitments to the Millennium Development Goals. For example, at present roughly 10 million people living with HIV have access to antiretroviral treatment.) Nevertheless the AIDS epidemic is growing in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. (<http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2013/july/20130702mdgsreport/>) IASSW feels that those goals could be buttressed by a clear and firm commitment by governments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, increasingly referred to as customary international law, which all nations must abide; the nine major human rights conventions, which are synonymous with international treaties; and United Nations monitoring procedures and other implementation mechanisms. Mindful of the words of former United States Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis that "government is our omnipresent teacher," it is our hope that such a commitment can result in a human rights culture which we have defined as a "lived awareness" of human rights in our minds and hearts, and dragged into our everyday lives (www.humanrightsculture.org). Such a culture is not "sentimental botch" to borrow a phrase from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. Rather, such a culture represents timeless values, which can be found in many of the world's major religions, like concerns for the marginalized and the powerless and a socially just order, if not what has been called The Spirit of Crazy Horse, which is "peace, humility, and everlasting love."

This human rights culture acknowledges, furthermore, the interdependency and indivisibility of human rights, as implicitly understood in the Millennium Development Goals, yet, explicitly emphasized in major human rights documents. What, after all, is freedom of speech to a person who is homeless and/or lives in a world at war? A major case in point is the right to self-determination recognized in international conventions and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its interrelationship with extreme poverty, particularly among Indigenous Peoples, who Ms. Sepulveda-Carmona in her reports points out, disproportionately suffer from the ravages of extreme poverty.

Whereas all of the principles and rights mentioned in the Special Rapporteur's document are of paramount importance, we ask that governments pay particular attention to the "moral outrage" of extreme poverty defined here as "the combination of income poverty, human development poverty, and social exclusion... where a prolonged lack of basic security affects several aspects of people's lives simultaneously, severely compromising their chances of exercising or regaining their rights in the foreseeable future." With that definition in mind, Ms. Sepulveda-Carmona then emphasizes foundational principles, which in brief are: the dignity, universality, indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence of all rights; the need for equal enjoyment of all human rights by persons in extreme poverty; the equality between men and women; the rights of children; the need for agency, autonomy, and participation in policy development by those living in extreme poverty; and transparency and accountability in policy making. She then outlines implementation requirements which briefly urge states to: adopt comprehensive national strategies to reduce poverty and social exclusion; ensure that public policies accord due priority to persons living in extreme poverty; ensure that facilities, goods, and services required for the enjoyment of human rights are accessible, available, adaptable, affordable, and of good quality; and ensure policy coherence.

It is our hope that the Final Draft of the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights become an actuality. Given that the human condition is moved towards altruism in

times of emergency, it is important to cultivate this sense of urgency, as the data above demonstrate, so that global social movements that are non-violent and commit themselves to a spirit of creative dialogue can emerge. As Nobel Peace Prize winner Jimmy Carter stated when accepting the prize that poverty is at the basis of disease, famine, guinea worm, HIV, and war. Thus, it is important to address this issue before violence erupts, echoing also the words of Eric Fromm, author of the *Art of Loving* that un-lived life leads to destruction.”

A major way to assist in the development of non-violent social movements is to encourage open and public debate, ultimately a creative dialogue among all stakeholders concerning the principles of the Final Draft of the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights. Governments and NGO’s may also wish to the viability of an International Convention to Abolish Extreme Poverty (CAEP). Whereas it may be customary in international fora to move from a “guiding principles” document, to a “declaration,” then a “convention” each respectively having more legal force, a jump from a guiding principles document to a convention would perhaps mirror the urgency of the situation. Furthermore, conventions having, as mentioned, the status of “international treaty,” would need to be implemented for some national constitutions have clauses similar to the Supremacy Clause, Article VI, of the Constitution of the United States of America which states in part that treaties once ratified “shall become the Supreme Law of the Land... and the judges bound thereby.”

Should it be considered premature to move towards a sturdier document like CAEP, we acknowledge that only chosen values endure. We ask at this time, therefore, at least, for: a robust debate on that Final Draft of the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights with the goal of implementing its principles; consideration of the eradication of extreme poverty in state constitutions; the attention of human rights monitoring committees to states’ compliance with the principles of the Ms. Sepulveda-Carmona’s exemplary document; and, finally, the integration of human rights principles into educational programs, broadly defined to include the media and other technological settings, from the grammar school to professional levels as age appropriate, particularly poignant in this Second Decade for Human Rights Education.
