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

Joint written statement* submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status, Sikh Human Rights Group, 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.

[23 August 2023]

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



Towards Inclusive Development: Polysemy, Debt Sustainability, and Global Tax Reform

Sikh Human Rights Group and Soroptimist International note the multiplicity of meanings that the concept of development has for the different stakeholders in the world. This polysemy has the virtue of making all parties feel inclusive in the development process and, to some extent, on their terms as well. However, this polysemy should not become a hindrance to the development process by going in all directions simultaneously. Furthermore, it should not be an excuse to deprive some communities of basic development needs by simply concentrating on perceptions of their idea of development. For this reason, we think a basic definition that identifies the core development needs, such as food sovereignty, debt-free financial foundation, education, basic housing, health, safe climate etc., has to be articulated with optional additional ideas of development, such as clean air, stress-free life, family life, support for viable small-scale farming etc as relevant to different communities and civilisations. This would create a common basic normative framework and a plural set of aims that can be differentially applicable.

Clearly, this construction of the meanings of development must be a collective work, giving a voice and allowing the participation not only of the least favoured countries but also of global civil society organisations.

In addition, we welcome the recent advances in the United Nations on taxation because of their impact on the right to development. While we welcome new solutions being put forward to improve the situation of countries in debt distress, we also note progress towards creating a UN Convention on International Tax Cooperation.

The number of developing countries at high risk of sovereign debt distress is growing steadily. Indeed, the size and conditions under which states borrow money directly impact their ability to realise the right to development of individuals and peoples, especially in developing countries. This is why, given the poly-crisis we live in, one way to act in two development-related areas simultaneously is to promote debt swaps linked to environmental protection. On top of the climate emergency that the planet is experiencing, in many developing states, debt servicing hinders the implementation of measures necessary to enforce the right to development, particularly climate-related issues. This crossroads (climate emergency - debt sustainability) places too heavy a burden on countries to cope with the natural disasters caused by climate change. This, in turn, increases their borrowing costs. As a result, these countries can neither meet their development targets nor cope with climate change.

Considering this, a possible solution would be to reduce countries' debt obligations if they commit to financing local projects focused on environmental protection by freeing up financial resources previously earmarked for debt repayment. This exchange procedure has already been implemented in Belize and Costa Rica, so we think this successful and mutually beneficial process can be accelerated and promoted in other countries. It is encouraging to see how regional initiatives such as the Climate / Sustainable Development Goals Debt Swap from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Africa or the Caribbean Resilience Fund are gradually emerging.

Secondly, the recent adoption of General Assembly Resolution 77/244 is a milestone on the road to a more inclusive and fairer global tax system. Indeed, while tax cooperation is currently led by the OECD (albeit inefficiently, leaving many loose ends untied and systematically favouring developed countries and tax havens), this resolution calls for the creation of a legally binding UN Convention on International Tax Cooperation.

We are glad that this instrument aims to establish clear international principles, objectives, mechanisms and institutions for future tax cooperation. A fairer and more inclusive tax legislation will provide the international community with better tools to fight tax evasion and illicit financial flows.

Improved tax cooperation will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of developing countries' tax systems, making more resources available to finance public services to pave the road to development.

It will also improve the fight against international tax evasion by Transnational entities and very wealthy elite, thus increasing the tax revenues of all countries concerned.

The challenges ahead are indeed considerable. However, with the proper political will, redefining the current cooperation framework will be possible to reflect the contemporary international configuration better.
