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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: “Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication”

Statement submitted by VAAGDHARA, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Fostering social development and social justice through social policies is crucial for sustainable development. However, addressing the widening socio-economic gap between indigenous and non-indigenous communities is a significant challenge. The indigenous communities accounts about 6 percent of total population of the world. They constitute above 5000 different groups having distinct cultures, forms of social organization, livelihood practices, values and beliefs which is profoundly embedded in their collective relationship with the lands and the territories they occupy.

These communities encounter multifaceted challenges on their journey toward social and cultural development. They grapple with the enduring effects of a history marked by injustices such as colonization, dispossession of their ancestral lands and resources, systemic oppression, and more. These historical injustices have made indigenous communities one of the most marginalized demographic groups in the world, as they struggle for their fundamental rights to pursue social, economic, and cultural development.

The indigenous communities continue to embrace a culturally rich lifestyle that encompasses both social and economic dimensions. This is evident in their circular lifestyle approach, which emphasizes restoration and regeneration, minimizing waste and harnessing renewable energy sources. Within this system, one subsystem's waste becomes another's resource. They cultivate nutritious, climate-resilient food items, reducing their reliance on external markets and guaranteeing food security while enhancing their income. However, in the present-day world, the growing emphasis on profit maximization has become the central objective in economic transactions and this shift has disrupted their traditional practices, leading to heightened inequality and a range of challenges, negatively affecting this community's access to quality healthcare, education services, food, nutrition, and livelihood security.

While they are known for their self-sufficiency and self-governance in meeting their basic needs, it is essential to recognize their traditional practices and their needs to exercise their fundamental rights. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007, affirms their right to improve economic and social conditions without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions. However, their practices are evolving as they are increasingly influenced by the modern world, leading to a potential loss of their distinct social and cultural identity.

Effective inclusion of indigenous peoples is crucial to identifying and addressing structural obstacles that hinder their participation in various programs. Their involvement is crucial in designing, monitoring, and implementing social protection policies and strategies to ensure respect for their social rights, cultural appropriateness, and relevance to their needs and aspirations. Even the Government social security policies should be framed which incorporate and uphold the cultural values of indigenous communities and draw inspiration from their models for the greater good.

Through this statement, VAAGDHARA urges to realize that the indigenous communities have multiple solutions to the global challenges and without seeking their support, the achievement of SDGs by 2030 cannot be imagined. Addressing their challenges is a prerequisite for achieving social development as well as social justice and accelerating progress toward the implementation of the 2030 agenda.