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### Commission for Social Development

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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: poverty eradication**

### **Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, 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.

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\* E/CN.5/2011/1.



## **Statement\***

1. Poverty eradication takes place at an individual level, by educating and investing in persons, and enabling their creativity and natural capacities to develop and flourish. It requires whole communities to work together for the common good. Poverty eradication requires strong families who take seriously their duties and responsibilities in caring for their members and building intergenerational solidarity. On another level, the State is responsible for good governance, curtailing corruption and ensuring that conditions exist for human beings to bring themselves out of poverty and flourish in accordance with their intrinsic dignity.

2. The World Youth Alliance, a global coalition of young people promoting the dignity of the human person in policy and culture, welcomes the opportunity to review the current year's priority theme for the Commission for Social Development: poverty eradication. In preparation for the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, the statement will focus on the importance of the family in helping to eradicate poverty for young people, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

### **The family**

3. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society. Since it was adopted, the United Nations community has struggled with the meaning and implications of such recognition. What is a fundamental group unit? Should support and protection be given on the political level or the community level? These questions have to be answered in order to understand how support for families helps to eradicate poverty.

4. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society because it is the place where children first experience what it means to be loved and recognized unconditionally. This does not mean that children always experience unconditional love in the family, but we recognize this as the purpose and function of the family. The family is "natural" because it is prior to the State, and not created by the State. The goal of the State is to recognize families as the fundamental units that enable social function and development. The family is therefore both prior to, and necessary for, the development of free, healthy and flourishing societies. Support for the family, because of its importance with regard to social functioning, as well as the care and well-being of children, the aged and the most vulnerable, should be provided on the political and the cultural level.

### **Youth**

5. The launch of the International Year of Youth on 12 August 2010 marked the beginning of a year's worth of activities aimed at encouraging youth participation and dialogue and mutual understanding. During the year, young people will join together and commit themselves to dialogue on issues affecting them.

6. The family is of primary importance to young people, because it influences all the issues that youth are currently facing, including unemployment and the effects of climate change. The encouragement and love a youth experiences in family life is directly related to how well he or she does in school and consequently impacts the

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\* Issued without formal editing.

chances of getting a job. Therefore, support for the family is essential to recognizing and promoting the rights of young people, especially as they relate to poverty eradication.

### **Persons with disabilities**

7. It is important to promote the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms for disabled persons, which among other things, shows our respect for the diversity of the human condition. Persons with disabilities are consistently and continually examples of the values of self-improvement and personal development. Their unique contribution to society encourages us to fulfil our duty to aid and protect them.

8. There are approximately 650 million persons with disabilities in the world and 80 per cent of them live in developing countries, many in conditions of poverty. The isolation of people with disabilities is caused by stigma, discrimination, myths, misconceptions, and ignorance. These problems have a two-way relationship: disability increases the risk of poverty, and conditions of poverty increase the risks of disability. Poor people are more likely to have a disability because of the conditions in which they live. Disability is likely to make people poorer because of limited opportunities and discrimination. Too often, Governments and communities fail to provide special health care and education needed for the integral development of persons with disabilities, which generates cycles of poverty through generations.

9. Both in developed and developing countries, individuals are targeted for termination based solely on their disability; genetic diagnosis and prenatal screening technologies are often used to identify persons with disabilities prior to birth. This practice ignores the intrinsic dignity of the human person and is a clear violation of human rights. Member States in both developed and developing countries should adopt measures so as to avoid these violations which encourage poverty and underdevelopment.

10. There is an urgent need to close the gap between policy and practice by mainstreaming the perspective of persons with disabilities in realizing the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs are intertwined and thus if one is altered the others are affected. Therefore, the role of States, civil society and the private sector in mainstreaming disability must be defined, but not without defining the role of the family beforehand. The family is the primary place where persons with disabilities can be cared for and learn how to care. It is within this institution that the weakest and most vulnerable members of our society are defended and protected.

### **Older persons**

11. Older persons are those persons ages 60 or 65 and older, roughly equivalent to retirement ages in most developed countries, although the definition changes from country to country and over time. In the past few decades, issues related to ageing populations have risen to the forefront of the development agenda. It is witnessed that recently, there has been an increasing number of persons surviving into the advanced stages of life.

12. Legalization of euthanasia has followed from the debate on issues of an ageing population. Under the framework “dying with dignity”, in some countries suicide is

assisted for people suffering chronic physical and mental pain. It is acknowledged that in various cases assisted suicide was carried out for people who appeared to be lucid.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, respect and care for the elderly, which has been one of the few constants in human culture everywhere, reflects a basic interplay between self-preserving and society-preserving impulses which has ensured the survival and progress of the human race. Assisted suicide will lead, over time, to a decrease in political will to provide palliative care and health-care services by decreasing the demand for them. Pressuring the terminally ill to take their own lives when they believe they have become a burden violates human dignity.

13. Only through solidarity can humankind undertake the challenge of an ageing population. Since the family is the school of solidarity, it is necessary to enable the family as a whole, including its male members, to participate in and share the burden of caregiving. Elders fulfil the role of educating and passing on values to the younger generation; this role has ensured man's survival and progress and promoted a culture in which intergenerational solidarity fosters the common good, especially the realization of responsibilities towards future generations.

14. Worldwide, the overall responsibility of the family to provide the traditional care and support needs of the ageing is diminishing. Therefore, there is an evident need to educate the general public, and in particular families, with regard to the ageing process. It is important that the ageing have access to basic literacy and self-maintenance education, as well as solidarity education, starting at an early age so that ageing is understood as a natural process.

### **Conclusion**

15. Poverty eradication requires recognizing the role that families play in the lives of all persons, including young people, persons with disabilities and older persons. Social development, and therefore economic development, cannot occur without this fundamental recognition by the State and society, and a corresponding support structure for the family.

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<sup>1</sup> In his congressional testimony to the United States Congress in 1996, Herbert Hending, M.D., stated that for a substantial number of people in the Netherlands, physicians had ended their patients' lives without consultation with the patients.