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**Leave No One Behind:
The agenda of the United Nations should respect Nature
and listen to the people**

“The worst thing about living in extreme poverty is the contempt - that they treat you like you are worthless, that they look at you with disgust and fear and that they even treat you like an enemy.”

“We experience the violence of being discriminated against, of not existing, not being part of the same world, not being treated like other human beings.”¹

Time and again, poverty is associated with violence against the people that suffer it. Poverty is frequently a consequence of human rights violations and also a symptom of them. The first quote is from a person living in poverty in Peru. The second from a person in France. The feelings expressed are essentially the same, even when the countries in which they live may be officially classified under very different economic standards.

To leave no one behind means beginning any project and creating any policy framework with the full participation of people living in extreme poverty who know what it is to live and survive and overcome poverty.

The United Nations has always embodied the hopes of people living in poverty, exploitation and oppression. The UN was established on the idea of freeing people from fear and from want. In 2000 the Millennium Declaration reaffirmed the inherent dignity of every human being and established its task of making it happen.

The world has enough resources to meet those promises. Over the last two decades international trade multiplied by five and global income more than doubled and now averages more than 30 dollars per day for each of the seven billion people that inhabit the planet.

¹ Comments from participants in seminars with grassroots activists and persons living in poverty, quoted in Brendan Coyne, Xavier Godinot, Quyen Tran and Thierry Viard, “Towards Sustainable Development that Leaves No One Behind”, Working Paper, ATD Fourth World, June 2013.

This wealth is more than enough to provide a dignified life for all, but it is very unevenly distributed. Both in developed and developing countries, the share for workers of the growing economic pie has diminished. Now many people that do have jobs do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Before 2008, the progress made on key social indicators such as infant and maternal mortality or primary education had been slowing in spite of economic prosperity. Now it is at risk of regressing. In the last five years “austerity” has become the fashionable economic policy. Thus, in too many countries, governments and international institutions have responded to the global financial and economic crisis, which has already resulted in millions more unemployed workers around the world, by enforcing cuts in social protection and essential public services.

At the same time, irresponsible consumption and production patterns have surpassed the capacity of nature to regenerate itself. Both the global meteorological disasters caused by climate change and the financial crisis affect the poor more than the wealthy. Inequalities exacerbate other injustices, disrupt societies, undermine the peoples confidence in their authorities and renders the economy inefficient.

No country alone can deal with these simultaneous threats of climate disasters, societies distorted by poverty and inequalities and economies that are not able to generate jobs, especially for the younger generations. New solutions must therefore to be found for old and new problems. The United Nations has started discussions, among governments, within the different international organizations and between them, to try to forge a new consensus.

The concentration of wealth in a few hands is, in itself, part of the problem, as even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) now recognizes: “Recent work has shown that prolonged periods of steadily rising output are associated with more equality in income distribution. In other words, more equal societies are more likely to achieve lasting growth”.² We are afraid that, as we have seen happening in too many countries, money seems to talk louder than the hundreds of organizations that speak on behalf of people living in poverty.

Some key words seem to have acquired new meanings. “Partnership”, for example, is used mainly to describe associations between governments and big corporations and the phrase “enabling environment”, which once meant an international economy supportive of the development efforts of poor countries now, is used to promote regulations favorable to business.

2 Discourse of IMF Managing Director, Christine Lagarde, May 15, 2013, available at www.imf.org

In Mauritius, a woman finishing a professional training scheme told us that “starting a small business was impossible. Help from the government doesn't reach the poorest.” The enabling environment for that woman is not the same as for a transnational corporation. While we know very well that small and medium sized businesses are employment creators, it is also clear that without strong unions and fair and progressive taxation, unrestricted corporations lead to economic growth without poverty reduction.

Our three organizations are very different in their origins and constituencies. ATD Fourth World works with people living in poverty and makes a unique contribution by creating the conditions needed for them and policy makers to have dialogue and innovate together. The ITUC is a global confederation of national unions, representing 175 million workers from 155 countries. Social Watch is a network of national coalitions of civil society organizations that monitor how governments are meeting their international commitments on poverty eradication and social and gender justice.

And yet, from our different experiences we have reached common conclusions about some key components of a new development agenda of the United Nations.

We agree with the many UN resolutions stating that poverty has multiple dimensions and cannot be understood or measured only by income. Poverty should not be statistically reduced just by lowering the bar. The \$1.25/day poverty line is completely inappropriate, as it implies that there is no poverty in developed economic societies in Europe or North America, which is obviously not true. On the other hand, the existence of poverty in rich countries should not be an excuse for those countries to ignore their international commitments to support development in a variety of ways, including by meeting their promised ODA targets.

Human Rights are one of the pillars of the United Nations and any development agenda has to be rooted in the legally binding human rights obligations that governments have committed to. The foundation of the right to development needs to be grounded on social, economic and cultural rights, women's rights, the right to work and rights at work. All of these are inalienable and indivisible and people should not be put in a situation where they must choose one or the other. No framework can claim to be based on Human Rights if it does not provide efficient monitoring, mechanisms of complaint and remedies in case of violations. The Guiding Principles on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty, adopted by the Human Rights Council and noted with appreciation by the UN General Assembly in 2012 clearly spells out the Human Rights obligations of corporations and of international organizations as well as the duty of governments to oversee the extraterritorial impacts of their policies and of the activities of industrial and financial corporations abroad. Countries should not abuse their status as donors or creditors to impose conditionalities or policies that imply violations of human rights or avoidable regressions in the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights. When trade and investment agreements and regulations conflict with human rights they should be

recalled.

Ensuring full employment and decent work for all and a universal social protection floor is an efficient mechanism for eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities including gender inequality and also promoting a genuinely sustainable economy. This goes hand in hand with

ensuring that vulnerable people live in dignity, that all people can access social services.

The planetary boundaries need to be respected and the burden of adjustment must be shared equitably by all, taking into account the contributions to creating the problem ("he who pollutes should pay the cost of cleaning") and the common but differentiated responsibilities of all countries.

This quote from a Brazilian participant in the assessment of poverty situations has a lesson for all of us. Including the United Nations: "If you are fighting for the same goal, then what happens? You'll use your wisdom and the others will use theirs. Because your knowledge is your knowledge. One learns from the other, one helping the other."

In developing a future framework relevant for global development, we need to listen and learn, to ensure we leave no one behind and to apply the core human values of dignity and solidarity.

We, three organisations, therefore commit to working for the global development agenda, up to and beyond 2015,

- to ensure no one is left behind, and implement the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, as adopted by the UN Human Rights Council;
- to prioritise promoting the international framework of human rights as the basis of development;
- to support full employment and decent work for all including the implementation of social protection floors at national level in all countries and advocate for an international mechanism to fund and support their establishment where available resources are not sufficient. We commit to strengthening the design, monitoring and implementation mechanisms that includes the participation of trade unions, civil society and those living in extreme poverty.