**39th Session of the Human Rights Council**

**Side Event on “Leaving no one behind- the role of participation and equality in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals”**

***17 September 2018 from 12:h00-13h30, Room XXVII, Palais des Nations***

**SPEECH BY DR. Maria Mercedes Rossi (APG23**)

**Title: The experience of APG23 in Participatory - People Centred Development and its contribution to the reduction of inequalities.**

Good Afternoon! First of all, I would like to thank the organisers of this parallel event for giving me the opportunity to present the experience of APG23 in Participatory - People Centred Development.

My organisation, the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, is an International Lay Association of Pontifical Right founded by Fr. Oreste Benzi in Italy in 1968 and accredited to ECOSOC with Special Consultative Status since 2006. Our members, from different states of life, share life directly with people living in poverty and marginalisation. We are committed to removing the causes of poverty and injustices and to being the voice of the voiceless through a non-violent action. Present in 36 countries on five continents, we share our life in almost 500 welcoming realities all around the world with *children in need, vulnerable youth, persons with disabilities, old people, ex-prisoners, drug users, alcoholics, vulnerable women, people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS etc.* We have also a Nonviolent Peace Corps where volunteers operate for peace and reconciliation in zones of conflict.

At the United Nations we advocate, among other priorities, for the implementation of the Right to Development, the implementation of the recently recognised right to peace and the recognition of the right to International Solidarity. (APG23 also coordinates the working group on Right to Development of the Forum of Catholic Inspired NGOs in Geneva to which eleven organisations belong, and intervenes on its behalf at the Open Ended Intergovernmental Working Group on right to development of the Human Rights Council).

In the framework of its global commitment to promote integral development and the full implementation of the Right to Development, APG23 is involved in a wide range of social activities and development initiatives at grass-roots level working with people living in extreme poverty in both developing and developed countries. Our projects throughout the world follow guiding principles on development that are inspired by the direct sharing of life with the people living in poverty and marginalised, by the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church and the principles affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Charter and the Declaration on the Right to Development**.**

During the Post-2015 process leading to the adoption of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), jointly with different civil society organizations and networks, APG23 has actively participated to the efforts, both at national and UN levels, to integrate all human rights - including the Right to development - into the 2030 Agenda.

APG23 recognizes the significance of the transformative vision of the Declaration on Right to Development at the core of the 2030 Agenda that, if adequately implemented, will provide a new impetus for realizing the Right to Development and will have a significant impact on the enjoyment of human rights by everyone, everywhere. Moreover, in implementing the SDGs, it is necessary to adopt a Right to Development approach that enables the different actors and stakeholders to focus not only on the single outcomes that must result from the national agendas, but also on the process by which those outcomes are achieved.

Development of individuals and peoples cannot be reduced just to economic growth and material wealth. True development should respect, first of all, human dignity as a core value and should be integral,encompassing all the dimensions (political, cultural, economic, social, ethical and spiritual) and aspects of human life, including the religious dimension. People should come first above profit, above the particular financial interests of some individuals and corporations, above anything else. People should be empowered and become protagonists of their own development rather than remaining objects of assistance and charity that on long run create dependency.

Our experiences in the field, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, shows that development is successful if centred on the human person and on human communities and ensures active and meaningful participation**.**

Some of our projects, likeco-operatives, microfi­nance programs and job placement initiatives, educational programs, etc. consti­tute actual experiences of person/people-centred development at grass-root level based not on charity but on justice.

To give just few examples: in Italy, we have one of the most innovative and large-scale experiences realized by APG23 that is the network of social cooperatives gathered in a consortium called “Condividere” (Sharing), aiming at integrating disadvantaged people and persons with disabilities into society and employment. This network of APG23 social cooperatives is active since the 1990s.

Our cooperatives are based on a people-centred approach and on the primacy of cooperation, solidarity and equity principles (compared to self-interest and profit ones) both in the social as well as in the economic sphere.

We run 82 centres located in 10 (out of 20) Italian regions that provide welfare services to almost one thousand persons who are disadvantaged and/or with disabilities and currently regularly employ 135 persons with disabilities. Some of these centres provide welfare services and educational activities for the social inclusion of the disadvantaged and of persons with disabilities; others centres run economic activities (as gardening, mechanical assembly, public spaces maintenance, handicraft, agriculture) with an organizational model that allows the persons with disabilities to be empowered and employed, being able to operate in a market environment and realize economic earnings.

In promoting the social and employment inclusion of disadvantaged people (as homeless, former drug-users or ex-prisoners) and persons with disabilities, APG23 social cooperatives combine the traditional cooperative approach with the “direct sharing” practice. Based on it, the entire organizational and productive structure is defined and oriented by the specific individual abilities, qualities and needs of any people involved, starting from the most vulnerable and fragile. The purpose of ensuring a decent work also for the more marginalized by the economic system, as persons with disabilities are, is therefore achieved through the full recognition of the dignity of every single person.

In Zambia, one of our most relevant projects to be considered as good practice in pursuing the fulfilment of the SDGs at national level is the **Rainbow Project**, a large-scale **model of care** **for orphans and vulnerable children** operating since 1998 in Ndola and Kitwe Districts.

The spirit of the Rainbow Project is to keep the vulnerable children in related or non-related families, mobilizing the community and networking with the different organizations that are already operating on the field.

The model acts as a community-based project, coordinating with different local community-based organizations in Zambia with the aim of providing solutions together to the different situations faced by vulnerable children and AIDS orphans in daily life. The model aims to preserve the local culture, and return to people, especially women, the opportunity to have a prominent role in their own development.

Most of the families caring for vulnerable children need to be supported in terms of food, education, and health care, but the real challenge is to avoid the "dependence syndrome". For this reason, the Rainbow project has developed an **agricultural micro-credit scheme** using the "**Twin-Track approach",** which aims to find a balance between short-term needs and long term self-sustainability.

The Rainbow Project supports different local organizations for a range of programmes such as: educational support, shelter for street kids, medical assistance, microfinance programs as well as the nutrition program which aims to fight against malnutrition.

Our Association runs in Zambia also the Cicetekelo (=Hope) Youth Project that aims to enabling youth who were living on the street and/or are vulnerable to become self‑reliant. I still remember Paul, a 12 years child found on the street of Ndola by the educators of the project. He is now an adult, married with two children, able to look after his family and with a permanent job. He came few years ago in Geneva to give a witness at our parallel event on children living on the street!

Both projects are examples where community participation and the direct involvement of people living in extreme poverty in planning, decision-making and implementation constitute the key to the success of the project.

In a unified and integrated vision, such projects/programmes aim at granting **access to development processes to vulnerable people and groups**, otherwise excluded from them, by realizing concrete solidarity actions that **contribute to the reduction of the inequalities between and within countries, between groups and peoples**. We try to forge new paths of partnerships for sustainable development that arise first of all at grass-roots level and through inclusive and truly participatory processes in the spirit of the **international solidarity** principle.

Local communities and people at grass-root level know very well what means development for them and can come out with very innovative ideas if involved through effective community participation. My twenty-years experience as a missionary doctor in Zambia bears witness to this!

A billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty in recent years; however, although this is true, so is the fact that inequalities have grown. We live in a world of plenty. Yet, for so many people across the world, this is also a period of a great deprivation.

On 28th April 2014, Pope Francis wrote in a twitter: “Inequality is the root of social evil”. It is,indeed, very true!

Inequalities within countries keep raising and, according to World Inequality Report 2018, the top 1% of the richest individuals in the world earn twice as much as growth as the bottom 50% individuals since 1980’[[1]](#footnote-1) and ‘the richest 1% of the world’s population now control up to 40% of global assets, while the poorest half owns just 1%’[[2]](#footnote-2). The poorest 10% earns only between 2% and 7% of total global income.

Economic inequality causes the perpetuation of poverty and social exclusion and, thus, creates gaps in the access to health, education, housing and other services essential to the enjoyment of economic and social rights. Extreme inequality, instead, can undermine opportunities for political participation and accountability[[3]](#footnote-3).

Inequalities and right to development are strictly related. The consequences of inequalities threaten the enjoyment of the right to development. Recognizing that societies cannot reach full potential if all the segments of the society are excluded from participating in, contributing to and benefiting from economic, social, cultural and political development is the first step to combat inequalities[[4]](#footnote-4). It is a known fact that inequality not only undermines development in an economic dimension, but it also threatens democratic life, social cohesion and resources redistribution.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Right to Development places the emphasis not only on the equality of rights but also on equity .The terms equality and equity are sometimes used interchangeably, which can lead to confusion because while these concepts are related, there are also important distinctions between them. In fact, equity is a concept that goes far beyond the fair redistribution of benefits calling for the creation of equal opportunities.

Participation, empowerment and accountability must become components of the development process necessary to address inequality. As stated in articles 2.3 and 8.2 of the Declaration on the Right to Development, participatory process is of utmost importance in all development-related processes at all levels. States, on the one side, are obliged to design development policies through a process of participation and, on the other side, they ‘should encourage popular participation in all spheres as an important factor in development and in the full realization of all human rights’[[6]](#footnote-6).

The fact that inequality levels are so different among countries, even when countries share similar levels of development, highlights the important roles that national policies and institutions play in shaping inequality.

Humanity has to face economic, climate change, energy as well as values crisis that are moving towards an even more decisive increase in inequalities both in developing and western countries. The challenge of today is both to address the deepening inequalities and persisting poverty and to ensure a life of dignity for all.

The wisdom of the right to development together with international solidarity and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda represent valid and effective instruments to achieve a more equitable development and universal access to the elements of development for all people. Time has come to leave no one behind, and to eradicate all forms of discrimination, for a meaningful participation for all human beings to enjoy an integral development that consists in social, cultural, political and spiritual development.

I would like to conclude by quoting again Pope Francis in his speech to the CEOs at the Fortune/Time Global Forum in December 2016:

“Our world today is marked by great unrest. Inequality between peoples continues to rise and many communities are impacted directly by war and poverty, or the migration and displacement, which flows from them. People want to make their voices heard and express their fears and concerns. They want to make their rightful contribution to their local communities and broader society, and to benefit from the resources and development too often reserved for the few. While this may create conflict and lay bare the many sorrows of our world, it also makes us realize that we are living in a moment of hope. For when we finally recognize the evil in our midst, we can seek healing by applying the remedy.”

.

1. The World Inequality Lab (2018). *World Inequality Report 2018* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. United Nations, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1 (21 October 2015), Goal 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ignacio Saiz & Kate Donald (2017) Tackling inequality through the Sustainable Development Goals: human rights in practice, The International Journal of Human Rights, 21:8, 1029-1049 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. UN General Assembly, *The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives, and protecting the planet: Synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda*, A/69/700 (4 December 2014). Available from http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/reports/SG\_Synthesis\_Report\_Road\_to\_Dignity\_by\_2 030.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. World Bank Group, *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law*, pp. 10 and 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ### UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Right to Development*, A/RES/41/128, (4 December 1986), article 8.2

   [↑](#footnote-ref-6)