



**Written statement submitted by Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23) on the HRC 3rd Intersessional meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda "Building Back Better: Integrating Human Rights in Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic"**

APG23 joined the third intersessional meeting of the Human Rights Council focused on the implementation of SDG 10 on reduced inequalities and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

The emergence of COVID-19 has paved the way to a widespread erosion of human rights throughout various parts of the world. As a matter of fact, under the guise of security the violations of the human rights of the most vulnerable are numerous, notwithstanding countless efforts made by the members of civil society as well as by the United Nations. The causes of these structural violations are deep-rooted in the societal structures of the countries where abuses were occurring way ahead of the emergence of COVID-19. Hence, it is of paramount importance to acknowledge where these critical issues stem from in order to foster solutions capable of exerting sway on the causes rather than the consequences.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a systemic crisis affecting economies and societies in unprecedented ways; it has reversed decades of progress in the fight against poverty and in the struggle to achieve sustainable development goals. It has exacerbated the violation of civil, political as well as economic, social and cultural rights. More specifically, COVID-19 further exacerbated existing problems such as widespread corruption, inequalities, arbitrary detentions, lack of access to education and health services and endemic violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic offered some States the opportunity to impose curfews and internet shutdown on the population. While the authorities imposed curfews repeatedly and intermittently blocked access to the internet, freedom of expression and assembly are suppressed by excessive use of force alongside harassments, arbitrary arrests and intimidations. The groups most affected were again the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society. The indirect effects that the pandemic will bring in the long terms, seems to be more serious than the direct ones. That is the case of thousands of schoolgirls that due to school closures are facing forced and premature marriage, acts of violence and abuses in homes.

The Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, in Italy and in the rest of the world, is trying to offer everyday support and closeness to those who are experiencing loneliness, hunger and abandonment. We are facing this emergency distant but united, and since the outbreak of the COVID-19 we have put in place many initiatives to help the most vulnerable people. Volunteers, especially young people, have continued to work in the field, helping homeless and women who are victims of human trafficking and enslaved into prostitution. Our Association has also opened a "Covid Hotel" to welcome those who are positive to the virus and with mild symptoms and don't have possibility of being adequately cared at home or are alone. Finally, APG23 members and volunteers working on the five continents have chosen to stay and share the lives of the poor where they are, even in countries with fragile health systems.

We believe that health is a fundamental right and universal health coverage a key component for the Sustainable Development Goals. The health and social crisis caused by the COVID-19 emergency has highlighted the structural weaknesses and critical problems of the health systems around the world. The pandemic has also emphasized the importance of strong public health care systems and emergency preparedness for communities and economies globally. As Pope Francis said in a message to the virtual plenary meeting of the Vatican's

Pontifical Academy of Sciences: “Healthcare systems need to become much more inclusive and accessible to the disadvantaged and those living in low-income countries<sup>1</sup>.” Greater investments in universal health coverage and public health programmes that are inclusive and equitable are necessary for leaving no one behind, especially the most vulnerable.

Each dollar invested in healthcare instead of warfare, has proved its social returns. The COVID-19 pandemic united humanity against a common enemy, which cannot be defeated through bombs or bullets. Only together, helping each other to forge a common and multifaceted response to the virus, we can as humans come out as quickly as possible from this challenge. No weapon has ever helped humanity to achieve a better life, and certainly it won't during this crisis.

We believe that a significant reduction in military expenditures could release a lot of resources to be redirected towards social expenditures and achievement of the SDGs. It is only by building peace day after day that a positive social tissue can be generated. There is a need for a peace that can overcome disruptive forces and crises, able to react to the violent impulses arising from social and economic conflicts and the tensions of the marginalised suburbs. A real and lasting peace will only be possible as Pope Francis said “on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the key instruments that APG23 proposes to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development is the creation in every country of the “Ministry of Peace”, an innovative response to the need for human security and well-being. A Ministry of Peace should be entitled to defend human rights, manage social conflicts, promote civil defence, implement disarmament policies, educate on non-violence and prevent violence.

In today's world, many forms of inequalities persist (and the pandemic has exacerbated them) fuelled by profit-based economic models that do not hesitate to exploit and even kill human beings. It is therefore necessary to increase and direct international cooperation and global partnerships for the development of all peoples in order to organise and maintain a balance between human needs and planetary boundaries. This will benefit the whole world, since "aid to the development of poor countries" implies "the creation of wealth for all"<sup>3</sup>. This requires that all nations, even the poorest ones, can be heard during the decision-making process. The elimination of inequalities requires a kind of economic growth that can enhance the potential of each region and thus ensure sustainable equality.

Nonetheless, extreme poverty, rampant inequalities, and environmental degradation affecting the most vulnerable part of the population are just the tips of the iceberg. Regarding the root causes, which have a bearing on the problem of sustainable development, we need to address the deep and root origins of injustice which are often intertwined with the current economic model. As suggested multiple times during the events of “The Economy of Francesco” held in November 2020<sup>4</sup>, the ecological collapse that our world is witnessing urgently requires a different vision in which economic growth is not an end in itself.<sup>5</sup> We need to design a regenerative and distributive economy that is sustainable, people-centred and inclusive, and which is capable of combining the necessity to safeguard at the same time planetary and social boundaries. “A circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations”<sup>6</sup> is needed while moderating their consumption and maximizing their efficient use. “We need to design development policies that have at their centre the human person and that, instead of incentivizing the “throwaway culture,” promote social justice, solidarity, and respect for the fruits of the earth and human life”.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/10/07/201007d.html>

<sup>2</sup> **Address on Nuclear Weapons**, Nagasaki, Japan (24 November 2019); *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25-26 November 2019, 6

<sup>3</sup> BENEDETTI XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 67: AAS 101 (2009), 700

<sup>4</sup> <https://francescoeconomy.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Comments from the Economy of Francesco meeting with Kate Raworth, <https://francescoeconomy.org/regenerative-and-distributive-economy-k-raworth/>

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*. On Care for Our Common Home, 22

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti*. On fraternity and social friendship, 188

Urgent measures should be taken to reduce inequalities such as debt cancellation for the least developed countries, ending unilateral coercive measures and countering tax havens and corruption. Likewise, States should respect all the commitments taken internationally, including the Paris agreement. There is a need to carry out meaningful reforms in global governance most notably in the economic arena to ensure equality, democracy and accountability in line with human rights standards and reinforce multilateralism. It is also time to make the Right to Development legally binding through a convention and recognise the right to international solidarity by pushing ahead the existing draft declaration.

Finally, a human rights-based approach and, in particular, the right to life perspective must also lead us in order to protect the most vulnerable people, such as the elderly and the persons with disabilities at the forefront of our sustainable development policies to achieve full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life. “Leaving no-one behind” also means recognizing that the value of every person is greater than his or her economic contribution and that our burdens are meant to be shared.

As public policies are gaining a renewed and central role in combating the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic consequences, they have to be increasingly inspired and driven by solidarity and equality principles and by a common good perspective based on the centrality of the human being.

Moreover, the available vaccines should be accessible to all and free of charge. They should not be a mere privilege of the population living in developed countries but a common good for all people living in our common home. We hope that this moment of great need may also be a fruitful time to strengthen international solidarity and close collaboration among States both in facing the pandemic and attain the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.