



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 November 2016

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-first session

13-24 March 2017

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Africa Development Interchange Network and United States Sustainable Development Corporation, non-governmental organizations 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

The impact of global integration on the living standards of people around the world who have historically been locked out of the systems of economic opportunity has resulted in a remarkable improvement in recent decades. It is also a double edged sword to many in the developed countries who have historically found themselves outside of the economic framework of some of the largest economies in the world. As the global community considers the way forward to ensure that disenfranchised populations are fully integrated into the world economy, the reality is that there are many regions in the global north that are just as disengaged from their national economy as any developing nation is from the global economy.

In his October 2015 New York Times article, “The Hypocrisy of ‘Helping’ the Poor”, author Paul Theroux describes globalization as “the search for the new plantation and cheap labour; globalization means that by outsourcing, it is possible to impoverish an American community to the point where it is indistinguishable from a hard-up town in the heartland of a third world country”. To travel through certain regions of the US south are indeed quite startling, but Mr. Theroux’s assessment of the region is not new and certainly is not purely an indictment of globalization.

One of the largest contiguous regions of systemic, entrenched poverty in the United States has been known as the Black Belt since the turn of the 20th century. The region, which is comprised of 300-600 contiguous counties depending upon how many states researchers choose when composing their methodology is an area that can span from Eastern Virginia south to Florida and over to parts of Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas. It was coined as such by Tuskegee Institute founder, Booker T. Washington when he stated that the term aptly described the deep rich soils in the pre-enslavement period, but following enslavement came to describe the high population of Indigenous and African descendants of colonialism and enslavement.

Nearly 15 years ago, the University of Georgia, was commissioned by veteran Senator, Zell Miller (D-GA) to conduct an analysis to determine what kind of economic development engine would best serve a portion of that region. For the purposes of their analysis, the area was described as the Southeast Crescent. He had been inspired by the Appalachian Regional Commission that had been championed by the late President John F. Kennedy and later by the late Senator Robert C. Byrd and wondered if such an infrastructure and industry recruitment model would work for the south eastern United States. A collaborative research initiative between the University of Georgia and Tuskegee University resulted in a two-part study, “Dismantling Persistent Poverty in the South” and “Dismantling Persistent Poverty in the South: A Community Based Perspective”. The University of Georgia study covered 242 counties across a seven state region of the south and the Tuskegee University study covered nearly 600 counties spanning an eleven state region of the south.

One of the most telling statements that was repeatedly made during the investigative process confirmed Theroux’s journalistic analysis which was that lifted off of the map of the United States, the six hundred county region of the south would look statistically much like the global south. Indigenous and African

descendants of colonialism and enslavement comprise the largest cultural and ethnic minority in the United States, in the year 2000 accounting for 12.1 percent of the total population. This population is primarily concentrated in the southern states, specifically in the aforementioned Black Belt and urban areas. Not coincidentally, some of the highest concentrations of poverty are also found in that part of the nation, where an average of 39 percent of children were living in poverty in 2013.

The poverty gap between those of European descent and those of Indigenous and African descent in the southern United States is a stark contrast. In Mississippi, 51 percent of children of Indigenous and African descent live in poverty compared to 18 percent of children of European descent. In Arkansas, 50 percent of children of Indigenous and African descent live in poverty compared to 20 percent of children of European descent, and in Louisiana those figures are 48 percent and 13 percent respectively. The impact of this disparity is further understood by comparison of the subsistence competencies that exist in cultures that have remained largely unchanged by major advances in technology and development and those where the skills that once afforded a family the opportunity to manage are now obsolete.

Despite the grim reality, that this area of the United States that looks culturally, statistically and economically like many developing nations, it continues largely unnoticed in the world community. There are only a limited number of discussions about a strategy for integrating the people of the Black Belt region into the Sustainable Development Goals and the corresponding 2030 Agenda, and most of them are occurring in silos. A comprehensive strategy that aligns the innumerable needs of the Black Belt of the United States with the priorities of the United Nations sustainable development goals is of paramount importance to the people of that region.

There is no way to consider the extent of child poverty in the Black Belt region and not recognize that there are women who are suffering to survive for their children. Extreme systemic poverty means that women are struggling to survive, girls are not being educated, babies are being born without having received the benefit of proper prenatal care and overcrowded and substandard housing conditions are more often the reality than the rarity. In short, where there is extreme poverty there are women who are suffering from all of the related ills of systemic poverty and where there are women suffering, there you will also find suffering children.

Silence is also a by-product of poverty. Those who are suffering are also often those who are least likely to be heard. Whether on the African continent, the Island of Haiti or in the Black Belt of the United States people in crisis are often voiceless in the global community. The need for Indigenous and African descendants of colonialism and enslavement around the diaspora to be able to convene both is of utmost importance. It is a necessity for the purpose of addressing the conditions of systemic oppression and poverty that continue to affect them as well as to better understand their shared cultural and ethnic legacy.

The following represents the specific request of the United States Sustainable Development Corp, a United Nations non-governmental organization which is stated in the official list of non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

1- A resolution to establish a Forum for Indigenous and African Descendants of Colonialism and Enslavement under the guidance of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent;

a. To share cultural tradition and history and forge strategic alliances between member states and civil society

b. To develop a collective data set to inform regional and international strategy

2- A resolution to establish a Platform for aligning the needs of the Indigenous and African descendants of colonialism and enslavement in the United States with the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda;

a. To develop a comprehensive strategy for integrating Indigenous and African descendants of colonialism and enslavement in the strategies and resources to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and 2030 Agenda.

b. To develop a delivery system to provide technical support, services and resources specifically to the Indigenous and African descendants of colonialism and enslavement in the United States.

c. Identify the Black Belt region (defined by the year 2000 US census graphic that depicts contiguous southeast region in which the highest density of Indigenous and African descendants of colonialism and enslavement of the United States are found) as an area in crisis.

We thank you for your consideration and implore you to act.
