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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: strategies for the eradication of poverty to
achieve sustainable development for all**

Statement submitted by Hydroaid, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

In the past year, in our work as a non-profit association dedicated to sustainable water resource management, we have been increasingly called to support cooperation efforts on the issue of migration. In the light of the current migration crisis, providing inclusive and sustainable services for both refugees and host communities has become a top priority for social development. Our contribution here is in the re-orientation of local governance systems through the balance of the needs emerged in the transition towards a new community arrangement and the necessity of ensuring the continuous enforcement of integrated public policies for managing essential services.

In this context, particular attention goes to the involvement of refugees — especially women, girls and youth — and the activation of specific channels for their dialogue with authorities, private businesses and universities, so that their integration can be truly sustainable and engine of development. It has been observed that many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are unlikely to be achieved without the effective and efficient use of water resources (SDG 6).

When we deal with water, however, it is not just a common good or a human right that we have in mind. Over the past decades, the concept of water has emerged from the traditional field of natural disciplines and entered more and more consistently into the sphere of human sciences, with the result that it became associated with the ideas of need, consumption and right. If taking a closer look, these all suggest a relation between human beings and their activities, ignoring to a certain extent the existence of water as itself, a natural element, intrinsically independent from the presence of man. In this different perspective, the relation between human beings and water can no longer be expressed in terms of exploitation (however sustainable it might be), need or human right, but in terms of respect, responsibility and dignity. The importance of water as an essential natural element is evident in the composition of the planet — from its specific combination of water resources in liquid, gas and solid state, to the delicate climate system regulating life on Earth — as well as in the history of human societies. For centuries, civilizations were born and grew in the proximity of large water bodies and to date rivers, lakes and oceans still contribute substantially to determine our lifestyle and well-being, especially in the case of the poorest and most vulnerable populations.

United Nations Resolution n. 10967 of 2010 recognised the access to clean water and sanitation as fundamental human right and several models have been formulated to increasingly optimize water resources management. However, the limits of the approaches adopted so far from the Water, Energy and Food Nexus to the new Sustainable Development Goals are in the utilitarian nature of the context where they are produced. Satisfying the primary needs connected to water has exceeded a critical threshold when human beings started to modify the environment at a significant level. Water, the blue oil of the 21st Century, is a strategic resource mirroring the complexity of the modern world. Due to population growth, technological innovations and increased consumption, the secondary needs multiplied as man invented new exploitation systems, turning resources into products whose necessity is induced and not essential for survival. The idea of

dominating nature characterises most of our history however, the impacts of this have only become noticeable in the past 200 years. Moreover, the planet dynamics are not oblivious to great climate-environmental alterations, but these usually take place along cycles of thousands and millions of years. The forcing of natural balance caused by anthropogenic activities, incompatible with the pace of the planet, appears even more disproportionate and concerning if considered in the frame of the Earth's complex system. Which is a system where each action big or small as the ability to generate reactions with feedback, that can sometimes be indirect and often unpredictable. Bending natural systems and their relations is therefore the most dangerous behaviour to compromise the safety of current and future generations. This belief inspires the principle of a general water culture, according to which water is not a material good to be used, but a natural element that we cannot overlook and must be protected as such, regardless of those interests, needs, policies and visions (typical of each group or community) that threaten it.

It is this very culture of water that we strive to promote in our activities, side by side with the know-how for managing it and the complementary initiatives for addressing the issue of poverty. As observed in the Holy See's statement at the 2016 Interactive Dialogue on Human Rights, "water becomes a social, economic, environmental and ethical challenge that involves not only institutions, but also the whole of society".

Three quarters of all jobs are connected to water (2016 World Water Development Report — WWDR). This data highlights our impact as much as our dependency from an over-exploited resource with deep social and economic implications. A system whose stability relies on unlimited growth over limited resources is in itself contradictory. Economic and environmental sustainability, however, are not incompatible objectives. On the contrary, they merge into the only real commitment: the conservation of water. This implies a re-orientation of our mind-set, adapting our needs to the resources, not the other way round. The answer is inevitably global and requires a strategy where the actions of individuals produce benefits for many.

Eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development is an ambitious goal that deals with several challenges: migration and climate change are just two of them. Re-orienting our mind-set and supporting the dissemination of a water culture are some of the responses we believe should be advanced.
