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STATEMENT BY THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON EXTREME POVERTY ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Far more than charity is needed to lift 2.2 billion people out of poverty for good, says Philip Alston

GENEVA (16 October 2014) – If poverty is ever really to be eradicated, States will need to adopt a human rights-based approach and to place the right to social protection at the centre of their anti-poverty policies and programmes, according to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston.

On the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, commemorated on Friday, 17 October 2014, the United Nations expert urged all international actors to go beyond charity by supporting the United Nations Social Protection Floor Initiative to guarantee basic income security and access to essential social services for all.

“Another International Day for the Eradication of Poverty... For many, this will conjure up images of helpless individuals, dependent on charity to survive, but such a stereotype is misleading and deeply problematic,” says Mr. Alston.

“The Biblical notion that ‘the poor will always be with us’ remains true only as long as the international community’s approach to poverty eradication is based on charity and discretionary governmental handouts, rather than on recognition of a human right to social protection.” According to the United Nations expert, the Governments must fulfil their human rights obligation to guarantee minimum social protection to everyone, rather than relying on a “Band-Aid” solution which perpetuates the need for charity.

Over 2.2 billion people – more than 15 per cent of the world’s population – are estimated by the United Nations to be either near or living in ‘multidimensional’ poverty with overlapping deprivations in health, education and living standards.

“This is not an accident”, in Mr. Alston’s view. “It is the result of a series of deliberate and conscious decisions by key actors who have chosen to prioritize other goals. The wiping out of extreme poverty could readily be achieved if it was a genuine priority of governments”.

In his forthcoming report to the General Assembly,* he calls on the international community to back the very widely endorsed joint United Nations Social Protection Floor Initiative that aims to guarantee basic income security and access to essential social services for all. He points out that one of the major obstacles to universal implementation of Social Protection Floors is the ambivalence of key international actors towards the concept, especially the World Bank, which remains reluctant to buy in to the Initiative in a meaningful way and has chosen instead to focus on ‘social safety nets’.

“Unless there is a change of heart on the Bank’s part, the development community will continue to be pushed to focus on so-called ‘social safety nets’, aimed at a limited number of the extreme

poor,” says Mr. Alston. “Poverty eradication will continue to be addressed as a matter of bureaucratically defined and designed welfare policy, rather than as a matter of human rights.”

(*) The promotion of Social Protection Floors will be the focus of the Special Rapporteur’s report to the General Assembly, to be presented on 24 October 2014. Read the report here: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/newyork/Pages/HRreportstothe69thsessionGA.aspx>

Philip Alston (Australia) took office as UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights in June 2014, following his appointment by the Human Rights Council. He is John Norton Pomeroy Professor of Law at New York University School of Law. Mr. Alston has previously served the UN in several capacities including as Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Special Adviser to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Millennium Development Goals, as well as chairperson of the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. As Special Rapporteur, he is independent and acts in his personal capacity. Learn more, log on to:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx>

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