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**Statement of the Triglav Circle by Charles Courtney, New York Representative**  
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Mr. Chairperson,

I have the privilege to address this Commission on behalf of the Triglav Circle, created to promote the core message of the World Summit for Social Development, which is a humanist message on the centrality of the human person, object and subject of all public policies, national and international, social, economic, as well as financial. It is natural, then, for us to participate in this 49<sup>th</sup> Session focused on the eradication of poverty linked to social integration and full employment in decent work, the three pillars of Copenhagen.<sup>i</sup>

Before describing the problem of poverty and proposing solutions, we think it is important to offer a vision of a good society. Such a vision gives both a standard by which to judge present reality and a basis for evaluating remedial work. When we see something that falls short of the vision, we can ask pertinent questions about why and how that is the case. Since we are dealing with a societal, even generally human, issue, we must think comprehensively. If my problem is that I have cut my finger or that my bicycle tire is flat, I can move directly to the appropriate remedy. But pervasive problems such as poverty touch every aspect of human experience. No realm must be left unconsidered or unquestioned.

Very briefly, here is our vision of a good society. It is one in which all are in it together, where each is expected to and able to make a contribution. Each person has responsibilities and receives the benefits of living in a healthy society. Whatever structures are created and policies instituted take account of the human dimension. If cost/benefit language is to be used, the costs and benefits for human beings must be major factors. The good society will affirm indivisibility in four ways: humanity is indivisible (each person is of equal dignity to all others); community is indivisible (each person is born from two others and relations with others are essential for human flourishing); the person is indivisible (body, mind, will, and spirit can be distinguished, but they are dimensions of a person and each affects all the others); human rights are indivisible (each right of the 1948 Universal Declaration is addressed to “everyone” and every one of them—civil, political, social, and economic—has equal standing).

Since we start with a vision of a good society, rather than moving directly to meet the needs of the poor (that would be to put a band-aid on the cut finger) we will examine a society’s structures and systems. We will ask whether they respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of all members. And that is precisely what Rhadika Balakrishnan of Marymount Manhattan College and her colleagues do in their recent project, “Macro-Economic Strategies from a Human Rights Perspective.”<sup>ii</sup>

By accepting the 1948 Universal Declaration, all member state of the United Nations have obligations to promote human rights: progressive realization, use of maximum available resources, avoidance of retrogression, satisfaction of minimum essential levels of economic and social rights,

equality and non-discrimination, and maximum participation, transparency, and accountability. We can immediately see the connection between these requirements and this session's focus on eradication of poverty through social integration and providing decent work.

The Balakrishnan team then shows how, based on empirical research in the United States and Mexico, macro-economics policies have implications for the protection and fulfillment of human rights. Their report has detailed discussions of several key areas of macro-economics: fiscal and monetary policy, revenue policy, expenditure policy, trade policy, and regulation of markets and property rights. The overall conclusion is that if one adopts a human rights perspective, the dominant economic model is called into question.

A few examples will show the implications of macro-economic policy for the realization of human rights. The data show that when expenditures for social programs are generous the results for health and education are positive. But when the trend is in the opposite direction, for example, favoring military spending, the results are negative. This point is confirmed both by following the trends across time in the US and by comparing the US with other industrial countries. Life-span is greater and infant mortality is less in Japan and several European countries than in the US. The two human rights concerns for the satisfaction of minimum levels of basic needs and for equality and non-discrimination are relevant here. The poor and minorities are most negatively affected when expenditure policy does not favor social programs.

The Balakrishnan team also studies revenue policy. Sales taxes fall more heavily on the poor and middle class because these groups use a greater proportion of their wealth for purchases of goods and services. On the other hand, inequality increases when income taxes take proportionately less from the rich. A tax policy that used the maximum of available resources for enhancing human flourishing would ask for an equally proportionate contribution from all citizens.

Trade policy provides a final example. Whereas NAFTA, the 1994 free trade agreement for North America, eliminated tariffs among Canada, the US, and Mexico, it also allowed a flood of subsidized low-price corn to enter the markets of Mexico. As a consequence, tens of thousands of small farms in Mexico were abandoned, there was a large migration from the country-side to the cities, and immigration to the US increased sharply. Worker protections were not included and have had to be introduced by non-enforceable side agreements between and among individual countries. Some benefit from NAFTA, but from the human rights perspective the human cost is huge.

It may fairly be asked whether these examples from wealthy North America are relevant to the world-wide problem of poverty. Our answer is that since we live in an increasingly connected world actions anywhere are likely to have consequences everywhere. This is particularly so because of the reach of global capitalism. If the practices of the market economy are left unquestioned, if the human factor is left out of account, human well-being and the environment will be under assault. If we were to make human flourishing and reduction of vulnerability the primary goal of our economies, we would have a project worthy of our best efforts. Let us meet that challenge!

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<sup>i</sup> See our White Paper: <http://69.89.31.101/~triglav.2003/03/seeking-an-ethical-framework-for-poverty-reduction/>.

<sup>ii</sup> The report can be downloaded from the US Human Rights Network website: [USHRnetwork.org](http://USHRnetwork.org).