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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: “Strengthening solidarity, social inclusion and social cohesion to accelerate the delivery of the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development as well as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

Statement submitted by Sikh Human Rights Group, 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

Achieving social inclusion and cohesion is essential to fulfilling the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration and the 2030 Agenda. In the pursuit of sustainable development, our interconnected world requires robust solidarity and inclusive strategies to ensure no one falls behind.

The Sikh community, rooted in values of equality, service, and unity, offers a powerful model of community-based solidarity and sustainability. For over five centuries, Gurdwaras – Sikh places of congregation – have served not just as spiritual centres but also as pillars of social cohesion and support. Every Gurdwara embodies the principles of equality and inclusion through the tradition of Langar, a free communal meal. Regardless of one's background, every person sits together to eat, erasing boundaries of class, religion, or social status. The daily service of tens of thousands of meals in Gurdwaras across the globe is not merely an act of charity but an expression of inclusive solidarity – a manifestation of our shared humanity.

Gurdwaras serve as hubs of social cohesion, fostering mutual understanding and breaking down barriers by bringing diverse communities together in shared spaces. The act of sitting side-by-side, sharing a meal, and interacting with one another strengthens the social fabric and enhances social cohesion. These acts reaffirm that community-led initiatives are vital in promoting inclusion and building trust in an increasingly fragmented world.

Strengthening Resilience through Community-Based Action: The Sikh ethos emphasises '*Sarbat da Bhala*,' the well-being of all. This guiding principle has motivated the Sikh community to step up in times of crisis, providing aid during natural disasters, public health emergencies, and social crises. Through their self-organised networks, Gurdwaras have been able to provide critical support, ranging from distributing food to mobilising resources for those in need. In times of disruption, such solidarity acts as a buffer, allowing communities to withstand and recover from crises.

We believe that **community-led models** can significantly contribute to achieving the goals outlined in the Copenhagen Declaration and the 2030 Agenda. This requires recognising the role of grassroots and religious organisations in bridging social gaps and advocating for inclusivity. Building social cohesion must go beyond policies and programmes – it must harness the power of communities to drive sustainable change.

Recommendations for Strengthening Solidarity and Inclusion:

1. **Recognise and Support Community Hubs:** Support for spaces like Gurdwaras, which foster unity and mutual respect, should be prioritised in policy-making. These hubs are invaluable in bringing diverse groups together, providing a sense of belonging and security.
2. **Amplify community-led social protection initiatives:** Community initiatives that address basic needs such as food security, shelter, and emergency aid must be integrated into social protection frameworks. The provision of Langar in Gurdwaras can be an example of inclusive growth that directly addresses hunger and promotes dignity.
3. **Promote Dialogue and Cross-Cultural Learning:** Policies should encourage cross-community dialogue and shared experiences, reducing prejudice and promoting understanding among diverse groups.

We urge the Commission to consider the crucial role of communities and religious institutions in creating inclusive, resilient, and cohesive societies. Let us work together to strengthen the bonds of solidarity, build bridges across divides, and empower every individual to contribute to a shared and prosperous future.
