

Delegation from the Republic of Colombia

Position Paper for the United Nations Economic and Social Council

The topics before the Economic and Social Council are: I. Education in Post-Conflict Situations; II. Implementing SDG 7: Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable and Modern Energy for All; and III. Promoting the Political, Socioeconomic, and Cultural Rights of Indigenous Peoples. While all three topics are of great importance to the Republic of Colombia, we believe that the recovery from conflicts and the fundamental role education plays in such situations is of particular urgency. We would therefore like to first discuss topic I., followed by topic II. and then topic III.

I. Education in Post-Conflict Situations

The Republic of Colombia would like to stress the utmost importance of education. Not only is the right to education listed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), it is also a cornerstone of sustainable development and human progress. The success of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is linked to the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality Education), as stated in General Assembly Resolution 72/222 (2018). Research has shown that education also plays a key role in establishing stability and lasting peace in post-conflict situations and should therefore not be seen as a secondary issue. This has been recognized in General Assembly resolution 64/290 (2010). The Republic of Colombia has ratified the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, which elaborated on the right to education in the UDHR, as well as the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. These international commitments show our dedication towards equal and inclusive education for all people. Today, illiteracy in Colombia has been almost completely eradicated and primary and secondary education is available to the vast majority of girls and boys. In spite of the decade long conflict within our country, we have continued to improve education in our country and we would be delighted to share our experience with the international community. Terrorist and rebel groups often operate in rural areas where government forces face difficulties in maintaining order. As a result rural populations, which are in many cases already structurally disadvantaged, suffer greatly from conflict. One consequence of this is lower quality of, as well as limited access to education. To improve education in rural areas, the Republic of Colombia adopted the Escuela Nueva model as a national education policy in the 1980s. Escuela Nueva means “New School” and is an education model developed in Colombia in the 1970s. It puts a focus on the students as self-motivated and independent learners. Students of varying skill levels teach each others in small groups, while the teacher offers advice and guidance. Furthermore, the students create their own curricula. This allows students that cannot attend school for prolonged periods of time, because of for example conflict, disaster or field work, to not be left behind and complete their studies. A UNESCO report from 1992 concluded that because of Escuela Nueva, Colombia was the only South American nation in which rural schools outperformed city schools. Several South American and Asian member states have since adopted Escuela Nueva in national education policies. A report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in 2016 also found the Colombian education system to be on a path of positive development. We believe that establishing a conference, the International New School Forum (INSF), would greatly benefit the international community. It should be set up under the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, headed by a participating member states’ education minister in a voluntary and rotating manner. It would convene every second year and be financed in part by the Education Cannot Wait fund, as well as by voluntary contributions of the member states. The forum would allow educators and policy makers from interested member states, especially developing ones that are recovering from conflict, to learn about Escuela Nueva education models and how to implement them in their countries, for example through workshops. It would furthermore facilitate exchange between member states that have already implemented such models, leading to even better policies.

II. Implementing SDG 7: Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable and Modern Energy for All

Energy is crucial for social and economic development. Yet still, 1 billion people around the world have no access to it. This shows the great importance of realizing SDG 7. The international community must strive towards a world in which every person enjoys the benefits of electricity, such as improved health, education and productivity. At the same time however, climate change and environmental degradation must be halted. Only sustainable energy sources can be the answer to

those challenges. The Republic of Colombia relies largely on hydroelectric power plants and the use of biomass. Steps to increase the generation of modern sustainable energy are also being taken. An example of this is the adoption of the Energy Plan 2050, which aims to diversify Colombia's energy sector with the inclusion of wind and solar energy. Recognizing that global action is needed in order to combat climate change, Colombia has also ratified the *Paris Climate Agreement*, which aims to keep global warming below 2°C. In the spirit of General Assembly resolution 67/215 (2013), which declared 2014–2024 the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, the Republic of Colombia proposes to establish a fund for sustainable mini-grid systems under the UNDP. Sustainable mini-grid systems offer many benefits. According to the International Energy Agency, mini-grid systems are the most economical solutions to provide electricity to rural areas that are not connected to a national grid. Furthermore, they are more reliable than off-grid systems and can often be integrated into expanding national grids later on. Contributions to the fund would be made on a voluntary basis by the member states. National governments of developing member states would be eligible to receive financial aid through the fund after an application process to an independent commission, in which the applicants lay out how the money will be spent in detail. Every Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) member state would appoint one expert for its term in ECOSOC. Projects financed by the fund would have to be based on renewable energies, like for example wind and solar. The organization Sustainable Energy for All, in particular the Clean Energy Mini-grids HIO Group, could provide advice and expertise, for example by acting as a bridge between companies and the applicants. In order for developing countries from all over the world to profit from this initiative, a certain percentage of the fund should be reserved for every region of the world. The exact allocation should be determined by the aforementioned commission and according to the needs of the different regions. We invite all member states to contribute to this proposal.

III. Promoting the Political, Socioeconomic, and Cultural Rights of Indigenous Peoples

For centuries, indigenous peoples have been struggling for equal political, socioeconomic and cultural rights. 15% of the people living in extreme poverty around the world belong to indigenous populations, even though they only make up 5% of the global population. Throughout the past decades, the United Nations have addressed these issues, yet numbers like this show that much more remains to be done. Indigenous peoples make up about 3.4% of the Colombian population. They have suffered greatly from the decades of conflict in our country, as the rural areas in which they live were especially affected by illegal drug trafficking and violent rebel groups. The historic peace agreement signed in 2016 between our government and FARC has had a positive effect on these communities and our country as a whole. In 1991, the National Constitutional Assembly declared a new Colombian constitution, which recognized Colombia's multicultural character and granted indigenous people autonomy within their territories. Many indigenous populations in Colombia are represented on the national level through the NGO "National Indigenous Organization of Colombia". In accordance with General Assembly resolution 69/2 (2014) and most recently General Assembly resolution 73/156 (2019), the Republic of Colombia has ratified the International Labour Organization's *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention* and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), both of which are international milestones in the fight for indigenous peoples' rights. We are committed to protecting our indigenous populations in accordance with these treaties. Like in Colombia, indigenous populations are only small minorities in many member states. Furthermore, they often live in far off rural areas. This results in them and their challenges being less present in public debates and institutions. To address this issue, the Republic of Colombia proposes the establishment of a conference, inspired by the positive results of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014. This conference would be called the "World Indigenous Peoples Forum" and it would bring together representatives of indigenous peoples and governments from all over the world, as well as UNESCO and concerned NGOs. The conference would be set up under UNESCO and take place annually. Its goals would be to raise awareness on the issues confronting indigenous peoples globally, such as the lack of representation in society and politics, as well as the facilitation of exchange between indigenous peoples and political actors across borders. We believe that through such a conference, indigenous peoples could gain the publicity and allies needed in order to promote their rights according to the UNDRIP. The Republic of Colombia offers to work with the international community towards greater recognition and protection of indigenous peoples and their rights.