

Delegation from The Republic of India
Position Paper for the Economic and Social Council

The issues before the Economic and Social Council are: Education in Post-Conflict Situations, Implementing SDG7: Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable and Modern Energy for All and Promoting the Political, Socioeconomic, and Cultural Rights of Indigenous People. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, “the future depends on what you do today”, India is looking forward to constructive discussions within the ECOSOC, since all topics are from crucial importance to “Leave No One Behind” in the future.

I. Education in Post-Conflict Situations

The Republic of India expresses deep concern about the raising number of children who remain out of school worldwide. Especially children living in rural areas mostly do not have the possibility to go to school because of the sheer distance or due to the lack of infrastructure in the aftermath of a conflict. Even though India is still working on achieving universal access for all, we made significant progress in universalizing primary education through the “Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE)” and by providing bicycles to children in remote areas to improve their access to school. India is convinced education and equal access to it must be seen as the catalyst for a society’s ability to rebuild and maintain peace and as the foundation of sustainable development. Therefore, more needs to be done to ensure equal access to education for children living in remote areas.

India considers the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which guarantees the right of education while emphasizing the international community’s necessary commitment to ensure this right from utmost importance. We also value the work of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which aims to guarantee the right of education after conflicts and the work of the NGO World Bicycle Relief, which distributes bicycles to children in rural areas. However, nor UNESCO’s “Education framework for Action” (FFA) or UNESCO’s “Global education monitoring report 2019, does explicitly deal with education in post-conflict situations nor do they propose any measures on how to fulfill the right of education in post-conflict situations. Therefore, far too little has been done to tackle the problem of long distances to school, especially in post-conflict situations. For India a circumstance not consistent with the aims and demands of General Assembly resolution 56/116 (2001), which highlights the right of every individual for education and Human Rights Council resolution 32/L.33 (2016), which stresses UNESCO’s leading role for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.

India proposes to overcome the barrier of a long distance to school in combination with poor infrastructure in post-conflict situations by providing children, living in rural and remote areas, with bicycles. This task is to be performed by the newly established *United Nations Educational Empowerment through Bicycles Agenda (UNEEBA)*. *UNEEBA* shall be funded and set up as part of UNESCO’s Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA). The bicycles are to be obtained from the recognized NGO World Bicycle Relief, as these have proven to be robust, durable and easy to maintain. These bicycles will be financed and distributed by the respective ministries of education of post-conflict countries. UNICEF and UNESCO will advise relevant ministries and propose areas in which they are particularly needed.

II. Implementing SDG7: Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable and Modern Energy for All

The Republic of India is convinced that in order to expand energy access and to fulfill SDG 7, it is crucial to enhance energy efficiency and to invest in renewable energy as 1.1 billion people still do not have access to any kind of energy. Especially rural areas of least developed countries are affected by the lack of energy, since these states do not have the capacity to electrify remote villages or connect them to a central power grid. Although India is still working on achieving universal access to electricity, we are already a driver of progress in this area. The key factor for our rapid enhancement of access to energy was the use and constant increase in the proportion of sustainable and renewable energy through the *National Solar Mission*. With this we increased our solar power generation capacity, decentralized distribution of energy and provided millions with energy in rural areas. As renewable energy will promote economic development and eradicate poverty, it is critical to develop adequate sustainable energy services through international efforts.

India values the efforts of General Assembly resolutions 62/197 (2007) and 65/151 (2011), which emphasized the role of sustainable energy for poverty eradication and development. With the installation of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) “Africa Regional Energy Programme for Poverty Reduction”, which promotes the implementation of decentralization in rural African countries, tangible progress has been made in achieving SDG 7 and poverty eradication. However, its measurements are limited to 12 countries and to non-renewable forms of energy. For India, this limitation is not in line with the aims of General Assembly resolution 70/1 (2015), which urges to leave nobody behind. Furthermore, as the “Energy Progress report 2018” has shown, solar solutions ranging from solar home systems to solar mini-grids are emerging as an important driver of rural energy access. Therefore, India is convinced that solar energy should be one of the main energy sources in order to stop the lack of access to affordable energy in remote areas of least developed countries.

India therefore proposes to provide households with solar mini-grids to improve access to affordable and modern energy, especially in rural areas of least developed countries. The newly founded *United Nations Solar Energy Deployment Commission (UNSEDC)* with its headquarter in Nairobi will provide advocacy, policy advisory and country programming support for the installation of solar mini-grids. The solar systems are to be financed by the states and will be provided through SDG 7 partnership programs and multi-stakeholder partnerships. *UNSEDC* will also provide experts from UN Energy and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) on renewable energy, which will assist countries, who bought solar mini-grids for their citizens, at installing them. The data for the areas in which solar installations are needed will come from the local energy ministries, UNDP’s Africa Regional Energy Programme for Poverty Reduction and UNEP. The commission should act as a subsidiary body of “UN Energy” and will be financed by it. We call upon the support of all members of the ECOSOC in order to stop the lack of access to renewable energy.

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

The Republic of India describes itself as a strong supporter of the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous people. Therefore, we established a panoply of laws, policies and constitutional provisions aimed at protecting the rights of such communities within India. However, until now an internationally criteria of identification of indigenous peoples has not yet been implemented. As a result, the International Labour Organization *Convention on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (No. 169)* defines the entire population of India as indigenous. The complex concept can thereby be expanded arbitrarily to also include societies where diverse ethnic groups have lived together for thousands of years in order to create artificial divides.

India considers *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007) (UNDRIP) from utmost importance since the adoption is fully consistent with the aims of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR). Moreover, India promotes respect for the provision of this resolution and is also supportive of the process that has been made with General Assembly resolution 70/232 (2015) by enhancing the participation of indigenous peoples and institutions in relevant meetings of United Nations on issues affecting them. Furthermore, we appreciate the work of the “United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues” (UNPFII), but the lack of a clear and legally binding definition leads to the fact that a growing number of non-indigenous people is using the UNPFII as a platform to raise issues pertaining to ethnic minorities, thus exceeding the mandate of the forum and therefore dealing with questions beyond its competence.

India proposes, in order to stop the misuse of the forum and the terminology of the word indigenous, to establish an international commission, that works out a legally binding definition of who is defined as “indigenous.” The *United Nations Commission on the Status of Indigenous People (UNCSIP)* will meet at the UN Office in Geneva and be financed by the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous People. The Commission shall be composed of members of the UNPFII, experts on international law, members from the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and representatives of countries in which indigenous peoples live. Once a definition has been drawn up that takes into account the historic background and the country-specific characteristics of each country, this definition is to be laid down in an international convention that will be voted on in the General Assembly. India calls on all member states to support the implementation of a universally accepted and legally binding definition of indigenous people.