



Statement

by

**Mr. Hassan Abbas
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**at the 2016 session of the
Economic and Social Council**

“Special meeting on inequality”

New York, March 30, 2016

Check Against Delivery

*Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations
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Mr. President,

Allow me at the outset to thank you for organising this very important meeting on Inequality. The meeting comes at a crucial juncture when governments are starting to mobilise their efforts and resources to integrate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted last September, into their national development plans.

It also comes at a period of time whereby global inequality within and among countries, if not tackled seriously and systematically, has the potential of reversing the successes that have been achieved at reducing inequality in many industrialised societies since World War II, and might risk further fuelling unrest, instability, conflict and violence around the globe, which would certainly discourage investment and trade, hinder economic growth and further deepen those inequalities.

Agenda 2030, including SDG 10, has successfully identified the areas that our governments have to focus on in order to successfully reduce inequalities, whether through adequate fiscal policies and social protection schemes, or through the elimination of discriminatory laws and apartheid-like policies that have constantly diminished the opportunities for certain social, economic, political or ethnic groups in our societies, such as women, minorities, people living in poor neighborhoods and slums, the young, the ageing and the disabled.

Of particular importance in our view, are efficient redistribution policies that aim at improving “human capital” through the provision of quality primary and secondary education for all, decent universal and affordable healthcare services, and effective vocational training and capacity building opportunities for workers, particularly in declining industries. Such policies will naturally add up to equally necessary fiscal redistribution and transfer policies that aim at protecting the most vulnerable and reduce the income gap.

Are those policies enough to solve the persistent inequality malaise? The answer is no, particularly in middle income and least developed countries, where those policies need to be complemented by international partnerships which include Official Development Assistance (ODA), technology transfer and capacity building. They must also be enhanced by better governance based on greater participation, transparency and accountability at the national level, and strengthened rule of law that protects human rights and combats corruption, all of which are necessary prerequisites for a just state and a flourishing and successful private sector in order to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Finally, Mr. President,

Throughout human history, economic and social inequality has been the main driver of migration, within and across borders, for people seeking better opportunities and prospects for themselves and their children. Those migrants have contributed to the rise and success of big nations in the industrialised world, and have become an integral part of the cultural, social, economic and political life of their new homes.

More recently, due to the advances in banking, and transportation and communication technologies, they tend to maintain regular contact with their countries of origin, and have been contributing their fair share at reducing inequalities within and among countries through the billions of dollars that they send back home every year in the form of remittances.

The most recent wave of mass forced displacement of refugees fleeing conflict that has severely affected the economic and social conditions in many Middle Eastern countries, including my own, and then expanded towards Europe, should not blind us from those facts. It can however give us a hint of what might happen in the future if the gulf of rising inequality between the “haves” and the “have-nots” continues to widen in an era where modern transportation has made human mobility simpler and cheaper. Building walls and isolationism are not the adequate solution to migration, which, when conducted in an orderly and organised manner, boosts economic growth in the countries of origin and destination, and helps offset some of the inequalities that were among the unintended consequences caused by the liberalisation of trade and the free movement of capital in recent decades.

Thank you.