Extreme Poverty: By Helena M Stephenson- Newark (Ohio) Think Tank on Poverty

1. Poverty status defined by the United States is set by comparing pre-tax cash income against a threshold set at three times a minimum food diet in 1963.

Poverty however is a multifaceted concept, which includes social, economic and political elements. According to Government statistics, 43.1 million Americans currently live in poverty. Reality is, much more of us live in Poverty and will continue to live in Poverty.

1. The most severe violations of Human Rights people who live in Poverty in the United States experience is, Individuals with Disabilities, whom every 1 in 3 lives in poverty, are denied reasonable accommodations to obtain and maintain employment. Employers who hire individuals with disabilities are allowed, by law, to pay individuals with disabilities, Sub-minimum wages (Fair Labor Standards Act Section 14). Individuals with Disabilities work in “Sheltered Workshops” earning far less than other Americans, and Individuals with Disabilities never get out of Poverty. Employment, in regards to Americans with Disabilities, violates Article 23 of the International Bill of Human Rights.

Children in the United States face many Human Rights violations. In the United States our Government views Children as property, rather than Human Beings. The United States has not ratified the CRC, however, if did, the United States would fail miserably. The United States champions “Re-Unification”, even after a Child was found to be severely abused by a parent (Matter of Jaden O. Hoff Circuit Court of Benton County, Missouri Probate Division Case No./Estate No. 11BE-PR00102). Jaden Hoff is a severely disabled child, who lives in Poverty, but was abused by his mother resulting in some of his diagnosis, and his life in Poverty.

There are 11,814,000 Single Parent households in America. Eighty percent of those single parent households, a single mother is the head of the household. Forty percent of the eighty percent live in Poverty. Single parent women face Human and Civil Rights violations, and those who live in Poverty are unable to afford the Legal Remedies to improve their situation. Most of the discriminations single mothers face in housing is 1) Family Status; and the main Human Rights Violation is 1) Sexual Harassment/ Servitude to maintain housing/shelter (CNY Fair Housing v. Waterbury).

42 million Americans depend on Food Pantries to feed or complete their food needs. The elderly stand in Food Pantry lines for hours. The disabled depend on the charitable transportation to and from Food Pantries. Children depend on canned food, a lot of which is expired, to feed them. Hunger is directly related to poor academic performance in school-age children. Yet, our Government claims “We are doing better.” I personally stand in these lines, it reminds me of when my Grandparents spoke about growing up in the Great Depression, standing in soup lines and cooking the family dog because they had not ate in six days.

1. People of Color face the most Social and Political Right infringements in the United States; 27.4% of African Americans live in Poverty and 26.6 percent of Hispanics live in Poverty. Gentrification (process of renovating a house or district so that it conforms to middle class taste) is largely responsible for the infringements that People of Color endure. I would like to call Gentrification what it really should be deemed, and that is Slumification. **Gentrification is new-wave colonialism, and it has economic, societal, and public health repercussions for poor communities of color. Many communities facing gentrification are comprised of, People of color, immigrants, and low-income single parents of all races. They have no resources left in their communities. They face language, cultural, education and societal barriers that set them at a disadvantage next to real estate companies and developers. Gentrification pushes low-income individuals into, what could be referred to as, slums. Crime rates go up, the schools in the area where individuals are forced out into are grossly underfunded and safe (Lead, Heat & Cooling efficiency, etc.) affordable housing are scarce. Gentrification is the forcible removal of poor people from the neighborhood into a segregated part of town. Out of sight and out of mind. These individuals have no say in the Local Governments who decide the gentrification. Why? To replace Government Officials, you need to Vote. Voter Suppression comes in many forms. But the poor are most likely not going to have transportation to the polls, not going to understand the Electronic Voting System and the Elderly and Disabled are not going to be able to stand in the Voting lines for hours.**

Gentrification is a denial of Dignity and Liberty to those who are forced to move. Politicians for the areas affected by Gentrification, sit on the planning boards who decide the gentrification. Residents have no remedy for relief.

Gentrified Neighborhoods: East Harlem, New York City (New York) , Mission District, San Francisco (California), Lower West Side, Chicago (Illinois); Where are all the former residents of these newly beautified neighborhoods?

1. You are entitled to a Free and Appropriate Education in the United States. But the quality of Education will depend on where you live. The funding of the American Public School System is Un-Constitutional, and al-though ruled on by courts in the past (DeRolph v State), it has yet to change. Your quality of education as a child will pre-determine your quality of life as an adult. In the United States, our Public Education System, for decades, has determined who will live in Poverty and who will not. Our Education System is far from the best in the world. But we in the United States cannot begin to address our Performance in academia until we address the fact that we geographically set students up to live and remain in Poverty by how we fund schools. Why change the funding for those schools? Black male students and students with disabilities in America are suspended from school at 3.5% rate higher than white & non-disabled students. So we segregated the minority families into one neighborhood with Gentrification, underfunding their schools. We send the students with disabilities to the same school claiming they do not have the resources in their Home District to accommodate.

If a student is suspended from school, they are 2 times more likely to drop out and 68% of males incarcerated are individuals with no High School Diploma. School-to-Prison-Pipeline begins with how we fund districts. Segregation never went away, our Government just got better at concealing it.

Education is a passport to the future. Those of us in Poverty in America are denied our appropriate education and in turn our right to work.

1. The United States refusal to ratify the ICESCR, basically affects our Right to Work. Yes, we have Trade Unions. But not all people employed in the United States are protected by Unions. A great example of how the ICESCR would benefit the American people living in poverty would be temporary employment agencies. One day, you have steady employment, the next you go to clock in only to find out; you are no longer needed at the Job site. It could be weeks or months before the Temp agency finds you another job assignment. This type of instability, when you already live in Poverty, is overwhelming to our Mental Health.

The United States refusal to ratify the CRC; The CRC would interfere with the Ponzi scheme in America better known as the “Family Court System”. If the CRC were to be ratified in the United States, our courts would have to follow the law. Evidence shows the Family Court System violates the Civil and Constitutional Rights children have as American Citizens. But children are viewed as property in the United States and not persons. The CRC would require the US to treat children as Persons.

If the CEDAW were ratified in the United States, women, especially single women, would have Paid-Maternity leave. We are the only developed country in the world to not pay Women on maternity leave.

The CRPD and the United States ratification of the CRPD is the most important to me, personally. As a person with autism, the CRPD would have given me many more protections then the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA and it’s protections are being gutted by the current administration. But if the CRPD were to be ratified in the US, I could finish my education. My children (also autistic) would have a brighter future. The CRPD would give my children a brighter future then the one the ADA gave me. Their right to education, their right to work, their right to live within their community, forever protected as a Human Right. People with Disabilities in America are the only group who has to negotiate their rights. We are given just enough to never ask for more.

1. *“What then can this Council do? First, we need to recognize that the concern is not solely with income inequality, but with a range of extreme inequalities in relation to wealth, access to education, health care, housing and so on. Second, our response should be motivated not only by these deep threats to economic, social and cultural rights, but also by the fact that the enjoyment of the full range of civil and political rights is undermined by extreme inequality. Third, while a great many steps will need to be taken if extreme inequality is to be halted, the Council needs to do more than just adopt fine words. For over 25 years, independent experts have been submitting reports warning of the consequences of inequality, but nothing has been done in response.”* – Philip Alston

Mr. Alston’s comments are in my opinion, correct. As a person who lives in poverty, nicely wrote, politically correct vocabulary and precise statistics in reports about poverty are not helping us. We need action. We need someone to come in and assist our Government on the realities of Poverty. How our Education system has pre-determined who will stay in Poverty, how Food Pantries are not a sustainable option for 42 million Americans to eat. We are supposedly the “Greatest Nation on Earth” but millions are homeless. The Social Systems in place failed me, failed the generations before me. We can do better, we have to do better. Other countries are doing better and we need their model. But first, our government has to be willing to listen and admit they have Poverty all wrong. Those of us in Poverty are not lazy, we have been failed. Some of us have been beaten consistently in life by the consequences of living in Poverty. Poverty is traumatic. Generations have been traumatized by the inequality that we suffer due to Economic Status.

1. It is tempting to list technology as a main culprit for the rise in inequality. But technology does not cause income disparity, but enables efficiency and wealth creation. Technology however, is contributing to the inequality produced by the Education System. A school district in a wealthier part of the State has the funds to provide school-age children with advanced technology and learning. Whereas schools in Rural America and the Inner-Cities are not. Coding and other skills now taught in Elementary level education with the use of advanced technology are rarely taught outside of the better funded schools.
2. I believe the Special Rapporteur should visit Newark, Ohio. We are a diverse metropolitan area in regards to Race and Disability. But the segregation due to Poverty (Income Inequality) is very evident. Another grossly impacted area would be the Appalachian region of the United States. In the Appalachia, every 1 in 4 lives in Poverty. The Ozark Region (mid-west) would give another example of how dire the situation is for us poor in the United States.
3. I hope the Special Rapporteur would consider meeting with the Newark Think Tank on Poverty.

"The Newark Think Tank on Poverty (NTTP) is a community-based organization founded in 2014, empowering people experiencing poverty to have a voice on issues impacting their lives. Those closest to the problem hold solutions to the problems, but are often farthest from the resources. From those, we build leadership networks and collaborations in order to create systemic change at the local and state levels.   In our three plus years of existence, The Think Tank has done excellent work in establishing working relationships with government agencies, as evidenced by the effectiveness of our call to action that led to the establishment of a county wide re-entry coalition. It is also shown by our “seats at the table” in social service agency planning committees (JFS, UW, the Shelter etc). These put us in a good position to conduct the participatory research. Our members have conducted community surveys on transportation needs, food availability, and community health.”

Thank-you for your time and consideration,

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