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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement submitted by Sikh Human Rights Group, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[9 August 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

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An SDG Micro-Certification Framework to Strengthen the Contribution of Community-Based Institutions to the 2030 Agenda and Human Rights

We wish to draw the Council's attention to an innovative approach for strengthening the contribution of community-based institutions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and, consequently, to the promotion and protection of human rights.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognized by the international community as a shared plan for peace and prosperity is intrinsically linked to the international human rights framework. Each Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) corresponds to existing human rights obligations, whether the right to food (SDG 2), the right to health (SDG 3), the right to education (SDG 4), or the right to living income for all (SDG 1).

However, a gap exists between high-level commitments made by States and effective implementation on the ground. Civil society actors, and in particular worldview-based community institutions, play a crucial but often underestimated and unquantified role in delivering essential social and environmental services. Their actions, grounded in values of solidarity and service, constitute a direct contribution to the realization of economic, social, and cultural rights.

This statement presents our flagship SDG micro-certification for community institutions. It is a framework designed to formalize, measure, and value their contributions. The model aims to provide community-based institutions with the tools needed to align their activities with the SDGs, strengthen their impact, and demonstrate their compliance with human rights principles in a transparent and credible manner.

The vital but unrecognized role of community-based institutions

Around the world, community-based institutions such as Gurdwaras (Sikh places of congregation), churches, mosques, or cultural centres are pillars of social life. Their activities extend far beyond the spiritual or cultural sphere. They provide daily meals to the most vulnerable, offer educational support to children, organize health campaigns, and act as social safety nets where State services are insufficient or absent.

For example, the Sikh concept of Langar (free community kitchen) guarantees a hot meal to anyone, without distinction of caste, belief, or social status, thereby embodying the right to food (SDG 2) and the principle of non-discrimination (SDG 10). Similarly, the principle of Seva (selfless service) motivates millions of volunteer hours in areas ranging from environmental protection (SDG 13) to support for the elderly (SDG 3).

Despite their considerable impact, these contributions remain unreported in national statistics and SDG reports. They are neither standardized, nor measured, nor recognized for their true value. This lack of formalization deprives these institutions of the recognition they deserve and limits their ability to collaborate with other actors, access funding, and systematically improve their practices.

A certification framework for accountability and empowerment

To address this challenge, we have developed an SDG certification framework specifically adapted to community-based institutions. The framework is based on a rigorous methodology, inspired by best practices in certification and project management, while remaining accessible and relevant for volunteer-led organizations.

The first step is to train the institution's leaders and volunteers on the SDGs and their links with human rights. The objective is to create a common language and help them identify how their existing activities (e.g., Langar, after-school tutoring) already contribute to specific goals. Based on this understanding, the institution develops a concrete action plan. This plan does not aim to create new activities from scratch, but rather to structure, improve, and

measure the impact of actions already in place. It defines clear objectives, measurable performance indicators (KPIs), and a realistic timeline. The institution implements its action plan over a defined period (generally 12 months). During this phase, it is required to document its activities and collect tangible evidence of its achievements (e.g., number of meals served, number of trees planted, attendance registers for educational programmes). At the end of the period, a final sustainability report is submitted. The assessment is carried out by an independent Certification Committee composed of experts in sustainable development, human rights, and project management. This principle of independence is the cornerstone of the system's legitimacy, in line with recognized standards for certification bodies. The committee reviews the evidence provided, assesses the achievement of the action plan's objectives, and, in case of success, awards the "SDG Certification".

Micro-certification: a precision tool for local impact

We describe this approach as "micro-certification". The prefix "micro" highlights several of its strengths:

- Targeted: It focuses on specific, measurable actions at the local level, where the impact on people's lives is most direct.
- Accessible: It is designed to be financially and administratively accessible to small volunteer-led structures, often excluded from large international certification schemes and macro-economic statistics.
- Precise: It requires granular data collection, enabling detailed analysis of impact and continuous improvement.

By adopting this approach, community-based institutions do not merely "do good" and serve their communities in line with their unique worldviews, but they demonstrate, with evidence, how and to what extent they contribute to the realization of fundamental rights. They move from being perceived as charitable actors to becoming credible and accountable development partners.

Recommendations to the Human Rights Council

The experience gained in developing this framework leads us to make the following recommendations, aimed at strengthening the role of civil society in the implementation of human rights:

a. Create an enabling environment for civil society organizations by simplifying regulatory frameworks and recognizing the value of their non-monetary contributions to society.

b. Support capacity-building initiatives that enable local actors to appropriate the language and tools of the SDGs and human rights, and to measure their own impact.

c. Foster partnerships between public authorities, the private sector, and certified community-based institutions, recognizing their certification as a guarantee of reliability and transparency.

Conclusion

The achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the full enjoyment of human rights cannot be attained by government efforts alone. They require the mobilization of all components of society. The SDG micro-certification framework we propose is a practical instrument to unlock this potential. It offers a pathway to transform acts of charity, often perceived as informal, into structured, measurable, and verifiable contributions to building a more just and sustainable world. By providing a framework for accountability and recognition, we can empower those who, on the ground, work every day to make human rights a reality for all.