

**SPEECH by Diversity Europe Group President Séamus Boland to
'UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights'
EESC plenary, January 2021**

Dear Professor De Schutter,

On behalf of the Diversity Europe Group, I whole heartedly welcome you to the Committee. You are no stranger to our work and I still remember your intervention in 2017, during our **Group conference** on *'The SDGs as a new frontier of rights and progress for the EU'*.

Today, we are still speaking about the same topic – **poverty** is after all the **1st SDG**. Very worryingly, it is expected that the Covid-19 pandemic will **increase global poverty** for the first time in **30 years**, with 8% of the total human population living in poverty. The pandemic has hit the most **vulnerable groups** in our societies the most. And of course, it has resulted in **new forms of poverty** and **inequality**, such as digital poverty and unequal access to health systems.

For these reasons, our Group has decided to concentrate its **work programme** on *'Poverty and the role of CSOs in combatting it'*. We plan to approach the subject from the broader context of the **impact of Covid-19 on our lives**. The green and digital transitions, as well as new initiatives such as the European Health Union, will be integral to the solutions.

Within this context, there are two points I would like to raise today. The first relates to **pivotal role played by civil society organisations during the pandemic**. Over the last eleven months, CSOs have acted as a bulwark at the local and community levels. They have provided incalculable assistance, in the provision of essential health and social care services, whilst also trying to keep poverty and inequality at bay. Working on behalf of or in addition to local authorities, CSOs applied their creativity, adaptability and energy to finding innovative solutions for the common good.

So within our Group, **our objective** over the next couple of years, will be to **raise awareness of this invaluable contribution** and to **set the ground for a key role by CSOs in shaping the post Covid era**. In making our communities more sustainable, resilient, equitable, productive and socially just, whilst also upholding the highest levels of democratic governance, respect for rights and the rule of law. Rendering European civil society more **sustainable**, involving them in the design and implementation of the **Recovery Plan for Europe** and helping them to redesign their own structures – this will be our contribution to poverty reduction within the EU.

The second point I would like to make relates to the **irrefutable links between increases in poverty and the erosion of rights**. Again, the Covid pandemic has brought this to the light more than ever. In the past, it was a right of the wealthy to go on holiday. Now, it is their right to stay at home! And whereas Covid has overruled so many of our other social and economic rights, it is also true that the 'open wounds' in our societies, be it domestic violence, gender inequality, child abuse, etc, have all been dramatically exacerbated.

By way of conclusion, I can only hope that the **positive legacies of this health crisis**, be it greater respect for care, well-being and community goods, as well as increased mutual solidarity, will outlive the pandemic, where poverty will be beaten!

Thank you for your attention.