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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority Theme: Affordable housing and social protection
systems for all to address homelessness**

Statement submitted by Concepts of Truth, Inc., non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

On November 7, 2017 a new UN NGO Working Group to End Homelessness (WGEH) was created to confront, among other things, poverty, health and inequality to “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.” As the working group states, “[S]treet homelessness affects us all – men and women, families with children, youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities. It occurs in nearly all nations and has severe negative impacts on both individuals and on cities. Street homelessness is growing in many parts of the world, and people who experience it are in danger of “being left behind” in the 2030 Agenda and in the wider effort to eradicate poverty.”

Poverty and homelessness are strongly correlated. Poverty is a complex, multidimensional problem and material poverty frequently coexists with emotional poverty. Emotional poverty can be caused by such traumatic events as sexual violence and resulting reproductive loss, increasing one’s vulnerability to sexual exploitation and resulting unwanted pregnancies and disease. These unwanted pregnancies in turn result in additional reproductive loss causing further emotional poverty in a never-ending cycle of despair and mental illness.

Homeless women are particularly vulnerable to multiple forms of sexual victimization including forced, coerced, or manipulated sexual activity. Levels of victimization that women endure before, during, and after episodes of homelessness remain enormously high, often occurring in multiple settings at the hands of multiple perpetrators. For example, 92% of a large, racially diverse sample of homeless mothers had experienced severe physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Thirteen percent of another sample of homeless women reported having been raped in the past 12 months, and half of these women were raped at least twice. Victims who are raped have a higher chance of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, some of which are incurable and can be carried over to the women’s children.

Pregnancy rates among homeless youth are much higher than those of the non-homeless population., and, according to one study involving 30 female, male, and gender-fluid homeless youth (ages 18–21 years), abortions are common. Respondents in the study claim that many of the homeless individuals either had, and/or knew of others who had attempted abortions outside of the formal medical system while experiencing homelessness.

For those victimized women who do have an abortion, many find that they were not prepared emotionally to deal with the aftermath of reproductive loss. Suppressed grief can secretly damage daily life through depression, anger, or broken relationships. Common symptoms include guilt, anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide, drug or alcohol abuse, eating disorders, a desire to avoid children or pregnant women, and flashbacks to the abortion itself.

According to a 2015 assessment by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 25 percent of the approximately 564,708 homeless people were seriously mentally ill, and 250,000 or 45 percent had some mental illness with the most common types of disorders being depression and bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders and substance abuse disorders. The combination of mental illness and homelessness can lead to increased levels of alcohol and drug abuse and violent victimization that reinforce the connection between health and homelessness. Poor mental health may in turn affect physical health, as mental illness may cause people to neglect taking the necessary precautions against disease. This combination of mental illness, substance abuse, and poor physical health thus makes it very difficult for people to obtain employment and residential stability.

Our current social institutions are not working effectively to protect vulnerable homeless women to recover from their circumstances. Staff members at general shelters for homeless women are inadequately trained to detect and respond appropriately and sensitively to trauma or sexual violence while fragmented services that force an individual to separate out and prioritize single problems that are in fact inextricably connected to others can exacerbate existing trauma. As a result, staff members can unwittingly worsen sexual trauma victims' psychological distress and compromise their ability to regain residential stability and increased quality of life.

Concepts of Truth, Inc., NGO is committed to educating each person with knowledge that will enrich their sexual and mental health. Concepts of Truth thus aims to educate the whole person to make healthy life choices that empower future generations using its curriculum, Concepts of Sexual Health, Sex & You, which relies on medical facts and research to transmit the truth about core values, self-worth, human rights, dignity, love and responsibility, and the science of sex to empower youth and families to make informed choices for themselves and the heritage passed on to future generations. The curriculum teaches that the human person exists as a multidimensional being and that one's sexuality is integrated in all dimensions of their humanity. The lessons stress that one's sexual health depends on making healthy informed choices in relationships and that these choices affect the whole person's present and future well-being as well as the well-being of their progeny. For women who have had involuntary or voluntary termination of pregnancy, Concepts of Truth provides compassionate and liberating counseling for them and their loved ones, regardless of their faith, lack of faith, or background. Concepts of Truth helps women and men find holistic health through the grieving process as they learn about the tasks of healing receiving peace and comfort and finding relief from conflict trauma or the possible trauma after abortion and miscarriage.

According to Millie Lace, founder and director of Concepts of Truth, NGO and author of Concepts of Recovery the Journey Facilitators Guide, "As a professional counselor in Arkansas, I have walked with hundreds of clients through the recovery process after abortion... there are many hurting people needing healing and restoration." Peace can be found when post-abortion symptoms are recognized and treated. Growth from the traumatic experience can be reached, spiritual and emotional healing achieved, and new-found freedom can be experienced for those willing to delve and heal from their past abortions.

As the authors of No Safe Place: Sexual Assault in the Lives of Homeless Women, aptly conclude, "The systems that impact homeless women who are sexual assault survivors require new funds, new forms of collaboration such as trauma-informed homeless services, and the combined energies and resources of funders, policy makers, service providers, and communities."
