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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

The Working Group to End Homelessness encourages the 66th Commission on the Status of Women to consider the impact of homelessness, shelter, or lack of it, as it pursues the priority theme of Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes. Homelessness is an egregious form of poverty, a barrier to human rights, well-being, and gender equality. The interdependency of climate, sustainable development and health must be accommodated as we aim toward the future. Climate change is a cause of homelessness and women suffer most from the effects of climate change especially at the nexus of homelessness.

The Working Group to End Homelessness, is a group of 22 non-governmental organizations that witness a concern for poor and marginalized people globally in programs and advocacy. Fourteen of members, make this joint statement. Dedicated to the elimination of homelessness in all its forms as described in E/RES2020/7 Paragraph 7, the Working Group partners with the United Nations, global platforms to end homelessness, academic centers and individuals who are/have experienced homelessness to devise solutions and call for change.

COVID-19 is forcing us to recognize that we are more interconnected and interdependent than ever before in human history. At the same time, we are facing a “triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution,” (Our Common Agenda, para. 61). Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 is critical as women suffer most the effects of climate change especially at the nexus of homelessness.

The socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have adversely affected recent progress on gender equality: violence against women and girls has intensified, child marriage is expected to increase, and increased care work at home is affecting women disproportionately. Women have played a critical role in the response to the pandemic as front-line health workers, caregivers, and managers and leaders of the response and recovery efforts. However, they remain underrepresented in critical leadership positions. The crisis presents an opportunity to reshape and rebuild systems, laws, policies and institutions in order to advance gender equality. A necessary and critical perspective is to recognize homelessness as an egregious form of poverty, a barrier to human rights, well-being, and gender equality.

The interdependency of climate, sustainable development and health must be accommodated as we seek to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic in order for gender equality to become a reality and poverty to be alleviated. Although the mechanisms through which climate impacts human health are becoming better understood, substantial knowledge gaps remain. One such gap is the role of shelter. As stated by the Climate-Homelessness Working Group in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto, Canada in the *Lancet* Vol397, May 8, 2021, “Housing and shelter are pivotal in considering the physical and mental health impacts of climate change for individuals without shelter or who live in temporary and unfit housing.” Homelessness is a trauma, with deep ramifications for psychosocial development for several reasons. The sudden or gradual loss of one's home can be a stressor of sufficient severity to produce symptoms of psychological trauma. The conditions of shelter life may produce trauma symptoms. Many homeless people – particularly women – become homeless after experiencing physical and sexual abuse and consequent psychological trauma. (Goodman, L. A., Saxe, L., & Harvey, M. (1991). Homelessness as psychological trauma: Broadening perspectives. *American Psychologist*, 46(11), 1219–1225.

Furthermore, homelessness in women tends to present differently than in men, with homeless women typically using and exhausting informal methods of support and housing, as well as domestic abuse shelters. In many areas, accessing informal methods of support and housing means that often women are not legally qualified as homeless (Suzanne Speak, 'The State of Homelessness in Developing Countries,' 2019.)

For homeless people in shelter that lacks safety, security of tenure, and sanitation, the risks related to climate change fall in two domains. First, such individuals and families are at risk of becoming homeless due to climate-change-related factors, including rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and economic strain due to energy, water, and food insecurity. Second, individuals who do not have shelter are exposed to an array of climate-related risks, including air and water pollution, extreme heat and cold, severe weather conditions and foodborne, waterborne, and vectorborne diseases. In cases when there are public health crises like COVID-19, they often lack access to necessary sanitation. The risks related to exposures are compounded by the compromised health of homeless populations, their inadequate access to health and social care services, and their limited inclusion in climate risk mitigation and disaster response strategies.

Add the fact that climate change affects human health and well-being with differential impact on populations and regions. Climate change disproportionately affects girls and women and can amplify conflict and violence in resource-deprived environments. We must highlight the concerns for women and girls as homelessness and climate change individually or in combination leads to poor health, is a risk factor for emotional health, reduces the ability to learn, to achieve sustainable livelihoods, and to flourish with human dignity and equality. While all homeless people face difficulties in accessing healthcare, evidence suggests that homeless women are disproportionately affected. (Grunwaldt, Alexa, Carla Medalia, Bruce Meyer, Angela Wyse, Derek Wu, 'Learning about Homelessness Using Linked Survey and Administrative Data', Becker Friedman Institute, 2021).

Women are often responsible for gathering and producing food, collecting water and sourcing fuel for heating and cooking. With climate change, these tasks are becoming more difficult. Extreme weather events such as droughts and floods have a greater impact on the poor and most vulnerable-70 per cent of the world's poor are women and often forced to migrate to unfamiliar areas, exacerbating caregiving responsibilities and facing a lack of skills for new jobs.

Women have the knowledge and understanding that is needed to adapt to changing environmental conditions and to come up with practical solutions. But they are still a largely untapped resource. Restricted land rights, lack of access to financial resources, training and technology and limited access to political decision-making spheres often prevent them from playing a full role in tackling climate change and other environmental challenges.

We urge to Commission and Member States:

- to identify the socioeconomic, cultural, political, and environmental variables and processes that comprise the climate-homelessness-health nexus and to devise strategies to address them, assuring that the interventions do not deepen existing inequities and are gender sensitive;
- to build on the lessons learned during the global pandemic of the relationship of homelessness to public health and climate change and to assure that no one is left behind as we accelerate to achieve the goals of Agenda 2030 and to enable all individuals and families to secure their human right to a home that is safe, secure, and appropriate, with social protections and supportive services;

- to seek prevention efforts that include the use of evidence-based strategies to generate new housing and improve the condition and viability of existing housing with respect to both cost and weather resilience;
- to generate data to enable the prediction of climate-vulnerable hotspots and how housing and shelter in those hotspots would be particularly vulnerable to climate events;
- to listen to the needs and solutions of homeless people, particularly women and girls, encouraging their participation in disaster response planning.

In the document “Our Common Agenda,” the Secretary General rightly urged all Member States, non-governmental organizations, and UN Agencies to respond to the need for a renewed social contract, anchored in a comprehensive approach to human rights, in the light of the pandemic and beyond, one that allows many more actors to tackle increasingly complex and interconnected problems! (para. 18). Gender equality, climate change and homelessness is such a problem. Now is the time to focus on housing as a fundamental human right and a determinant of health and sustainable development during the planetary climate emergency. The future must include gender sensitive prevention strategies and solutions that will end homelessness.
