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Statement submitted by Graduate Women International (GWI) and Women Graduates – USA, Inc., non-governmental organizations 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.

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Statement

In 2023, we are experiencing crises that include the war in Ukraine, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of displaced persons and the impacts of climate change. Despite commitments made in 2015 with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda to eradicate poverty and reduce hunger, 1.2 billion people are still living in poverty and 8 per cent of the global population will still be facing hunger in 2030.

Financial institutions and infrastructures, intended to promote economic growth and alleviate poverty, in fact contribute to perpetuating systemically generated poverty. Lack of financial literacy and education hinder individuals' ability to make informed financial decisions and reinforce poverty cycles, leaving women vulnerable to predatory financial practices. Alleviating generated poverty requires intersectional measurement index models to facilitate aggressive action.

Economic and financial tolls and climate disaster recovery greatly impact countries already under debt distress; the digital divide is intensifying; many children and young people are victims of poor-quality education or receive no education at all. These issues combined with the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss and the lack of gender equality and gender-based violence all prevent progress towards eliminating poverty.

The most vulnerable in our communities, including women and girls, young people, persons with disabilities, older persons and indigenous people continue to be at the foremost receiving end of these crises. Poverty disproportionately affects women, especially women of colour and single mothers. Women are often overrepresented in low-wage jobs and face barriers to economic opportunities. Women in poverty are often engaged in sectors highly sensitive to climate change, such as agriculture.

Efforts to address poverty-related issues, such as women's health, education and gender equality, often involve a combination of policies and initiatives. These may include social safety nets, healthcare programs, education access and reform, and legal reforms to protect women's rights and combat gender-based violence.

Addressing poverty among women often involves providing opportunities for skill development, vocational training, and access to income-generating activities. Economic empowerment can improve women's ability to access healthcare and provide for their families.

The relationship between poverty, education, and women is complex and interconnected. Addressing the educational needs of women is essential in the fight against poverty and for promoting gender equality.

Education is a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty. Access to quality education empowers women with knowledge, skills, and opportunities for economic advancement.

Gender disparities in education persist in many parts of the world. Girls and women are often more likely to face barriers to accessing and completing their education, including cultural norms, economic constraints, and gender-based discrimination.

Promoting girls' education is particularly critical. When girls receive an education, they are more likely to marry later, have fewer children, and earn higher incomes, all of which contribute to reducing poverty.

Education is a key driver of women's empowerment. Educated women have greater decision-making power, better access to economic opportunities, and improved health outcomes. Women Graduates-USA believes that safe access to education, especially for migrant women and indigenous women, and increasing the number of women who graduate from educational institutions, particularly in higher education, are essential for their economic empowerment.

Education equips women with the skills and knowledge needed to access better job opportunities and earn higher incomes. As women's economic participation increases, it leads to reduced poverty rates.

Education also correlates with better health outcomes. Educated women are more likely to make informed choices about their reproductive health and family planning, which leads to healthier families.

Education can help raise awareness about gender-based violence and empower women to seek support and protection thus playing a role in reducing violence against women.

Governments and organizations often invest in policies and programs aimed at improving girls' and women's access to education. This can include initiatives to remove barriers, provide scholarships, and promote girls' enrolment in schools.

Education is not limited to formal schooling. Lifelong learning opportunities, including vocational training and adult education, help women acquire new skills and adapt to changing economic conditions.

To achieve meaningful progress in the 2030 Agenda, it is important to remove barriers to girls' education, ensure access to quality schooling, and create an enabling environment that supports lifelong learning for women and girls. Environmental civics education programs can be implemented to accelerate progress in girls' education. This requires the collaboration of governments, international organizations, NGOs, and communities to work together toward these goals.

Women are disproportionately affected by poverty, which then severely impacts their health and well-being. Poverty accelerates the cycle of disadvantage and limits women's access to healthcare service, education, and economic opportunities.

Women's health is a fundamental right and critical aspect of their overall well-being. Comprehensive programs that address both economic and health-related needs, will make significant progress in improving the lives of women in poverty and promoting gender equality. Taking account of the unique cultural and societal factors that influence women's health and the specific health challenges they face. Particularly, access to reproductive healthcare, maternal and child health services, family planning, and screening for gender-specific health issues like breast and cervical cancer.

Maternal and child health programs are critical in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates, which are higher in impoverished communities. Programs should provide prenatal care, safe delivery options, postnatal care, and immunization services and access to reproductive healthcare, for women to make informed choices on spacing of pregnancies and use of contraceptives.

Good nutrition is vital for the health of women and children, including providing nutritional support to pregnant and lactating women in impoverished communities.

Healthcare educational is critical to empower women with knowledge about their health and rights. Raising this awareness helps women make informed decisions about their well-being.

Community-based initiatives, engaging local leaders, health workers, and community organizations are more effective in reaching marginalized women who have limited access to formal healthcare systems.

Climate-related disasters can disrupt access to reproductive health services, potentially increasing maternal health risks. Pregnant women and mothers with young children face particular challenges during climate-related emergencies. Increased heatwaves, changing disease patterns, and limited access to healthcare can negatively impact women's well-being.

Poverty creates conditions that increase the risk of violence against women. Economic stress, unemployment, and inadequate housing contribute to tension within households, potentially leading to domestic violence. Gender-based violence is often rooted in unequal power dynamics between men and women. Poverty exacerbates these inequalities, making women more vulnerable to abuse and less able to escape it. Women living in poverty may have limited access to financial resources, education, and job opportunities, which can make it difficult for them to leave abusive relationships or situations and economic dependency on abusive partners or family members can trap women in violent situations, as they may fear losing financial support or access to basic necessities. Other factors, such as race, ethnicity, disability, and immigration status cause some women to face multiple forms of discrimination and may be at even greater risk.

In addition, poverty can serve as a barrier to accessing support and resources to escape or mitigate such violence. Legal and policy measures aimed at addressing violence against women should include provisions to provide support and protection to victims, regardless of their economic status.

Women Graduates-USA believes that violence against women, in all its forms, is a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment and reducing violence against women is crucial for their safety and well-being.

Recognizing and addressing the unique challenges and strengths of women in the context of climate change is essential to achieving sustainable development and climate resilience for all. Women are Nature's partners, a life sustaining ecosystem. Therefore, when we protect the natural world, we protect women and vice versa.

Women living in poverty with limited access to resources, education, and economic opportunities are often disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change and experience barriers to adapting to changing environmental conditions. Addressing the intersection of poverty, climate change, and women's experiences requires a holistic and gender-sensitive approach.

In summary, Women Graduates-USA believes that all these issues are interconnected and interdependent. Addressing climate change, improving women's education, health and economic opportunities can contribute to reducing poverty and violence against women. Addressing these issues collectively is essential for achieving the broader goals of sustainable development, including gender equality and the well-being of all individuals, regardless of their gender.