



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

**Statement submitted by Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of the Mission, DePaul University, International Association of Charities, International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and Sisters of Charity Federation, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The five non-governmental organisations joining in this statement are faith-based organisations with ECOSOC accreditation belonging to the Vincentian Family. Together we count over two million members, working in 155 countries to restore dignity to people through eradication of poverty, hunger and homelessness. Through systemic change, we are enabling people living in poverty to identify the root causes of poverty, hunger and lack of decent jobs, and create strategies to change structures that keep them in poverty.

As this commission considers the priority theme, “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective” we ask you to consider two groups who are being left behind as the SDGs fall way below projected progress. The first is households headed by single women and the second are the Hidden Homeless.

Women who head households in impoverished regions of the world, and in politically fraught conflict-ridden areas are more likely to encounter injustices from gender-biased, discriminatory justice systems. Divorced women living in poverty are in a particularly precarious situation in regions where divorce is taboo as they may not be able to return to their father’s family home or may be seen as a burden. They have difficulties claiming land rights, driving them further into poverty and homelessness. Moreover, women and girls living in female-headed households are more prone to violence, and female children who are forced to work may end up trafficked.

The Vincentian Family encounters women who are stark examples of the feminization of poverty and have worked to help alleviate the enormous stresses that extreme poverty places on their health and well-being. With an increasing number of women left behind, our work is an uphill battle against the encroaching threats posed by the circumstances of poverty – violence, homelessness, joblessness, deteriorating health, social stigma and lack of access to education. One woman from Ghana shared her story with us about her youth spent in violence, poverty and fear, and her efforts to escape poverty through changing her geography and through marriage, neither of which could ultimately alleviate her poverty-induced traumas. Begging in the streets, treated with cruelty and aggression by law enforcement, and left alone by her husband, she lost all hope as a single mother finding herself in a foreign land. She has since found encouragement and empowerment through her encounter with the Vincentian Family, and she credits the aid they provided for her renewed efforts to improve her life. Hers is one of thousands of stories of devastation that marks the lives of women striving to fend for themselves, seeking shelter and an education that might accelerate their progress.

Women unable to earn income and living unhoused are vulnerable to endless abuse and discrimination. They are more vulnerable to the consequences of natural disasters and climate change, and the lingering effects of COVID-19. Many in Guatemala suffered the trauma of losing weakly structured homes and many loved ones in a devastating volcanic eruption several years ago and have yet to emerge from poverty since. This is a common dilemma in the wake of natural disasters. The Daughters of Charity and other members of the Vincentian Family have worked to build homes for some of the victims, but a tragic story of one of these victims made clear that even with a roof over her head, she was without a job and income, and lacked services such as child care that would be needed to sustain her.

The Daughters of Charity work with a program called GLOBE at St. John’s University, a Vincentian University in New York, USA, to provide micro-loans to women living in poverty in their communities who seek to open a small business or

expand an existing one. Over 200 women in 7 countries, including women who suffered from the volcanic eruption near Antigua Guatemala, have been able to earn income from their GLOBE-funded businesses. Since these women have limited rights to land, they sometimes are locked in legal battles with estranged husbands to have access to their property. Homes are often needed for these businesses to flourish as businesses operating out of their homes are more likely to succeed. The GLOBE program has resulted in success for over 200 women living in poverty around the world, in some cases moving them out of poverty through follow-on loans that enhanced their business success and allowed them to help or employ other women. Empowered and with increased self-confidence, these women have enough income to send their children to school or pay for needed medical expenses. Financing institutions must invest in these women living in poverty who encounter homelessness, violence and discrimination in order to bring them out of poverty, and break the cycle of intergenerational poverty that otherwise threatens to progress poverty well beyond the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs.

Feminization of Poverty points to an urgent need to reverse the trend of an increasing number of women living in extreme poverty. Many of these women, like the woman from Ghana and the woman from Guatemala, are the “Hidden Homeless” – cases of those women lost or forced out of their homes, sometimes temporarily, and not counted in the national statistics on homelessness because they live in provisional shelters or with other family members. Essentially invisible, these women merit additional attention and action in order to achieve SDG1 - eradicating poverty for all people everywhere, and SDG5 - achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. This involves financial reform, including tax reform, and restructuring government-supported programs to be fully inclusive of women and girls. Investing in gender-focused priorities and addressing the needs of the unhoused, allows for an increasing number of women to participate in the formal labour market. This benefits not only women, but also the countries where they live, ultimately resulting in greater productivity and earnings. For homeless populations, the long-term investment in empowering women and girls can help to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

The landmark 2022 resolution adopted by the General Assembly [76/133](#) on inclusive policies and programs to address homelessness including in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) urges member states to address the structural drivers of homelessness including lack of access to affordable housing, lack of access to land and land tenure, lack of access to credit or financing, and lack of financial and legal literacy. Enabling this goal will require intense and varied capacity-building in different settings, but the ultimate benefit of empowering the potential of women and girls is tremendous.

The Vincentian Family shares in the concerns expressed in the UN Women and UN DESA Gender Snapshot 2023 that highlights the trends and setbacks related to gender equality. We seek sustained investment in women and girls to accelerate progress in gender equality across the SDGs and urge a necessary focus on women living in extreme poverty.

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