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## Commission on the Status of Women

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### Statement submitted by Oxfam International, a 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Oxfam is deeply concerned by the escalating global inequality, mounting poverty, and widening gap between and within countries, and between genders. The compounding effects of ongoing economic and social crisis, supercharged by the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and conflict has led to the consolidation of power and privilege by a few elites.

Neoliberal capitalism and its attendant policies reinforce global gendered and racial hierarchies of power placing women, girls, and non-binary people, at the sharpest end of exploitation, segregated in precarious work without social protection or labour rights, often with triple burden of work as they fill in the gap left by non-existent, privatised and unaffordable public services, reversing decades of hard-won progress on gender equality and women's rights.

Governments, and policy-makers keep making choices that are not responsive to the needs of women, girls and non-binary people, disproportionately harming them (Oxfam, 2022). Debt, regressive and inefficient taxation and austerity policies, often perpetuated by International Financial Institutions (IFIs), prevent countries from the Global South from adequately financing public services. It is estimated debt payments alone cost countries in the Global South more than they spend on health, education and social protection. Concurrently, we see massive tax avoidance, inefficient tax breaks for corporations and largely under taxation of wealthy elites.

The ability of states - particularly in the Global South - to finance public services and social protection is also dramatically undermined by austerity measures which are often implemented as loan conditions or coercive policy advice from IFIs such as the IMF.

For instance, in 2023, more than 54 per cent of the countries that planned to cut their social protection budget as part of austerity measures already offer minimal to no maternity and child support (Oxfam, 2023).

Austerity policies or fiscal consolidation includes not only public spending cuts but also often privatisation of public services and systems, which limit access to services to those who can afford to pay for them, thereby denying fundamental rights to health, education and social protection. Privatisation also results in job losses and precarious work especially for women and non-binary people who are concentrated in these sectors.

The explosion in inequality needs to be reversed, not fuelled, for the world to prosper. Oxfam believes taxing the exorbitant windfall profits made by some big businesses and corporations in crisis times, while implementing a sustainable progressive taxation system, ending tax avoidance and a more systemic taxation of the richest in every country, is the (not-so secret) way to accomplish this. It is obvious: a progressive tax of up to 5 per cent on the world's multi-millionaires and billionaires could raise \$1.7 trillion a year, enough to lift 2 billion people out of poverty, and fund a global plan to end hunger. (Oxfam, 2023).

Oxfam is alarmed that instead of striving for transformation and reparation, any attention to gender is limited to 'including' women, girls and gender diverse people in a hostile system designed by and built for white, wealthy, privileged (cis)men in rich countries. This sits in the context of an extraction of wealth and resources from the Global South to the Global North, which has led to the destruction and undermining of national ecosystems and indigenous knowledge systems, and, depriving the former of space to set their own policies, without which they are unable to realize their rights.

Oxfam views these violent economic systems as a form of gender-based violence and scrutinizes the severity of its implications on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls through these thematic areas:

#### Universal Social Protection halted by International Finance Institution Policies

Public services and social protection serve as engines of equality, they are indispensable for women and non-binary people's economic, social and human rights, they pull societies together and close the gap between rich and poor and between women, non-binary people and men.

However, 85 per cent of the world's population is living in the grip of austerity measures. Austerity policies blend patriarchy and neoliberal ideology to further exploit the most oppressed people within society, and deliberately dismiss their needs. Austerity measures permeate the daily lives of women and non-binary people specifically: in their incomes, care responsibilities, ability to access services as essential as health, water, education, care, and transportation, and in their overall safety and freedom from physical violence in the home, at work and on the street.

Many countries pursued a failed model of social protection, often promoted by IFIs. Social protection is often targeted and based on means testing of who is 'poor' and who is not, which invariably leaves out large numbers of people in need of support, including women who might not be head of their households, or might not meet the criteria that is often gender-blind.

Moreover, targeted instead of universal social protection and public services often contravene international and national human rights obligations, while stigmatizing people who are living in poverty and reinforces gendered roles and violation of women's and non-binary people's rights.

In recent years, in some countries, the right to social protection has been eroded by inadequate reforms with negative social impacts and funding, resulting in lesser coverage and lower benefits, and has been strongly linked with formal markets, while women mostly work in informal jobs. As a result of these insufficient support systems, most countries are completely unprepared to support people during crises, leaving women, girls and non-binary people with further vulnerabilities.

Research by Oxfam and Development Pathways analysed the emergency social protection cash transfers in 126 low and middle-income countries between April and September 2020 found that the average investment towards emergency social protection was just 0.46 per cent of GDP. Just two countries reached 2 per cent, the rule of thumb benchmark for avoiding deep recessions; unemployment schemes did not exist in most of the countries analysed; they lacked automatic mechanisms that protect people who lose their income and benefits were inadequate to pay even for basic needs.

When delivered on a universal basis, "public services and social protection can contribute towards a redress of the discrimination of women's experience on the registers of gender, race, sexuality and class in the pursuit of their economic and social rights" (Third World Network, 2023).

#### **Recommendations**

- Invest in universal and gender transformative social services and protection prioritising women, girls and non-binary people, covering vulnerability and shocks through all life stages, beginning with the establishment of social protection floors, such as basic income security, access to healthcare and education, pensions, maternity protection, parental leave, unemployment, disability and other social protection measures.

- Promote a gender-transformative approach to social protection, which allows women to better cope with excessive time scarcity, care workloads, domestic violence and their weakened position in the labour market.
- Cease privatization and ensure donor governments stop promoting and financing the commercialization, financialization and privatization of public services like health care and education; and DFIs should follow the World Bank's IFC in ceasing to invest in for-profit K-12 education.
- Promote progressive taxation by permanently increasing taxes on the richest 1 per cent, also from capital income, with higher rates for multi-millionaires and billionaires. Tax the wealth of the super-rich at rates high enough to systematically reduce extreme wealth and lower power concentration and inequality. Address tax competition on corporate taxation and remove tax exemptions and loopholes in our tax systems that primarily benefit the rich or largest corporations.
- International Financial Institutions must end austerity and stop driving privatization of public services, and instead promote progressive taxation in their policy advice and policy proposals instead of recourse to austerity measures.

### **Centring Care and Climate Justice**

For decades, women and non-binary people have demanded fairer hours and wages, safe working environments, dignified working conditions, and recognition for their work but remain unpaid or underpaid.

Structural barriers such as lack of affordable child care, elder care or sick care facilities, lack of pre and after-school programs, unaffordable healthcare facilities, gender pay gap, together with poor remunerating livelihood options for women further lock them into disproportionate care work, and affects their physical and mental well-being.

If we count unpaid care and domestic work globally by women aged above 15 years, then it would amount to \$10.9 trillion annually, thrice the size of the world's tech industry (Oxfam 2020). Care work must also be viewed and acknowledged from a decolonial lens, as women from the Global South, often from countries that have been subjected to decades of IFIs austerity measures, leave their families to migrate to wealthier countries to provide care work.

This highlights how colonial legacies and economic inequalities drive migration patterns put racialized women and non-binary people in vulnerable situations with no access to social protection, as care work continues to be characterized with informality too often performed by documented/undocumented migrants.

The care crisis is also exacerbated by the climate crisis negatively impacting women's and non-binary people's physical and emotional health. Climate action, without any contextual assessment of care work, ultimately increases women's work. Increase in environmental care directly impacts climate change as it disrupts food, agriculture, forest and water systems.

Research shows that by 2025, 2.4 billion people globally could face water scarcity due to climate change (CARE Denmark, 2016). Women carers already living in poverty will be exposed to ever greater time poverty, vulnerability and violence, as well as the breakdown of social networks they rely on for support.

### **Recommendations**

- Governments must raise enough revenues for care infrastructure, care systems, universal social protection and public services mainly through progressive

taxes, including wealth and capital income taxes, curbing useless tax on corporate profits and richest individuals and a permanent taxation mechanism of windfall profits.

- Urgently invest in gender responsive, universally available, quality care infrastructure and national care services spanning across the life-cycle to address the disproportionate care work done by women and girls.
- Governments must ensure that all employment benefits include childcare support, paid parental leave, paid leave, reduced and flexible working arrangements irrespective of gender for those with caregiving responsibilities, supporting families to reconcile paid and unpaid work.
- Adopt a feminist and decolonial approach, shifting power to ensure women's voices and agency – as the global majority of workers are women, informal and unpaid; and are central to reforming institutions, investments and financing.
- Challenge harmful social norms, racist, colonial and sexist beliefs that see care work as the responsibility of women and girls, especially of migrant, racialized, marginalised women and girls leading to an unequal gendered distribution of care work.
- Workers in the informal economy - Governments must ensure legal, economic and labour market policies are in place to protect the rights of all paid care workers and monitor their implementation. This should include ratifying ILO 49 Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers and policy to ensure elimination of gender wage gaps.
- Integrate a care centred and intersectional approach to climate justice: A well-being, care-centred and intersectional analysis to understand the intersectional impacts of climate change cross-cutting with race, ethnicity, caste, class, sexual orientation and ability and advancing a feminist, equal and just transition is important.
- The new loss and damage fund must enable local-leadership in responding to climate-fueled events, and support gender-transformative action. Recognize, redress, and compensate for loss and damage, including non-economic loss and damage, explicitly applying gender lens to ensure they do not exacerbate existing inequalities, but instead reduce them.
- Allocate adequate climate finances for engagement of women-led initiatives, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ led organizations to take leadership and tackle the impacts of the climate crisis.