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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: “Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication”


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 (WGEH) is a group of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. We advocate at the United Nations for persons who are vulnerable, pursuing the human right to adequate housing for all and to end homelessness, so that all people can realize their human rights and potential. Dedicated to the elimination of homelessness in all its forms as described in A/RES/76/133 (2022) and E/RES/2020/7 (2020), and the report of the Secretary General on homelessness A/78/236 (2023), the Working Group to End Homelessness collaborates with the United Nations, global platforms to end homelessness, academic centres, and individuals who are or who have experienced homelessness to devise solutions and call for change.

The signatories to this statement, as Economic and Social Council accredited non-governmental organizations and members of the Working Group to End Homelessness (WGEH), urge the 62st Session of the Commission on Social Development to address homelessness in the exploration of the Priority Theme; “Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication”.

The three overarching goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - end poverty, protect the planet and ensure by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity-- “leaving no one behind,” are core to homeless advocacy. Homelessness is not mentioned once in the 17 goals or 164 targets, yet it is critical that preventing and ending homelessness be incorporated into National Strategies to achieve Agenda 2030 as we assess progress at this midway point. Globally, 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year and over 100 million are estimated to be homeless. Young people are the age group with the highest risk of becoming homeless and there is a growing concern about an increase in the numbers of elderly who are homeless. (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

When in 1995, the Copenhagen Declaration linked social Justice with social development, Member States used the term social justice as the equal opportunity to contribute to and to benefit from the common good. The common good requires a fair and equal society in which each individual matters, their rights are recognized and protected, and decisions are made in ways that are fair and honest. “We acknowledge that people are at the centre of our concerns for sustainable development and that they are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with the environment.” Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development - A/CONF.166/9 Chapter I, Annex.

The view that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities is also reflected in the over 75-year-old Charter of the United Nations. In establishing a World Day for Social Justice, the United Nations reaffirmed in the agreed upon language of the Copenhagen Declaration, “that social development and social justice are indispensable for the achievement and maintenance of peace and security within and among nations and that, in turn, social development and social justice cannot be attained in the absence of peace and security or in the absence of respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.” (A/RES/62/10 Para 1). The World Day for Social Justice also recognizes the need to consolidate further the efforts of the international community in poverty eradication and in promoting full employment and decent work, gender equality and access to social well-being and justice for all. (A/RES/62/10 para 4)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which identifies eradicating poverty in all its dimensions, including extreme poverty, as the greatest global
challenge and indispensable to sustainable development, aligns with a major concern of homeless advocates. Homelessness has been identified as “one of the cruelest manifestations of poverty, inequality and housing affordability challenges. It affects people of all ages, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Homelessness is also a gross violation of the rights to adequate housing, to security of persons, to health, and to protection of the home and family.” (ECOSOC, E/CN.5/2020/3, 1.3).

Ending homelessness is related to the achievement of all seventeen of the SDGs as they are considered integrated (interlinked), indivisible and balance the three pillars of sustainable development—economic, social and environmental justice. Lack of progress in one hinders all others. The SDGs are nationally owned and must be country led so each must determine what initiatives work best in their political, economic, and cultural setting.

In the post-COVID-19 era, at the midpoint of our way to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals, the global community is failing to live up to the commitments it had made in 2015. Multidimensional global challenges persist and threaten progress achieved so far by people, communities, and governments around the world. In a post-COVID world, we need to cure the virus of social injustice, inequality, marginalization, and environmental destruction, all of which are both causes and consequences of homelessness.

As representatives of civil society, we encounter people living in extreme poverty and note that for many, especially women headed households with children, poverty is deepening in some parts of the world. We see the effects of environmental disasters, discrimination, and hunger as it affects the ability to access education, health care, decent work and engage in a digital world. Providing adequate, affordable housing is critical to all of the above mentioned.

The Working Group to End Homelessness calls upon Member States at this 62nd Session of the Commission for Social Development to:

1. Recognize that homelessness is an affront to human dignity and an obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights. Human rights must be upheld, and Member States must fulfill their commitments to safeguard the right to an adequate standard of living which includes safe, affordable, and supportive housing for all.

2. Enact comprehensive policies and interventions to prevent and address homelessness, with housing and social supports, and include Persons Experiencing Homelessness (PEH) or at serious risk of homelessness in the design/implementation/monitoring of all policies and programs.

3. Adopt a comprehensive definition of homelessness reflecting the description in A/RES/76/133 and indicators to address the diversities of homelessness and measure progress toward ending homelessness, nationally and globally.

4. Collect and report in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on disaggregated data/demographics on homelessness that can be universally applied to formulate effective global policy.

5. Ending homelessness is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their promise to “leave no one behind.” Targets on homelessness must be added to each goal to begin to address the need for adequate housing with social support, and Universal Social Protection systems with floors, to alleviate homelessness.

In the words of Volker Turk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, (11 September 2023) “Ending homelessness and ensuring affordable housing are
firmly embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals. They are also a human rights imperative. States need to recognize homelessness as a violation of human rights that strips people of protections essential to dignity. I encourage all countries – particularly the most developed countries – to deploy maximum available resources to fulfil these rights, as required by international law.”