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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”

Statement submitted by the International Federation on Ageing 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.
Statement

As an international non-governmental organization whose membership base comprises government, nongovernment organizations, industry, academia and individuals, the International Federation on Ageing appreciates the opportunity to provide a statement at the 62nd Session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development towards the focus area: “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.”

At the core of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the goal of poverty eradication, and the message that no one should be left behind. However, older adults have often been left out of discussions around poverty eradication, despite the additional barriers leading to financial instability that they face. Older adults can feel the impacts of poverty at a disproportionate rate compared to other age groups. Older women also face more impact than older men due to additional forms of discrimination across the life course than older men. Therefore, it is necessary to call on the lived experiences of older persons and to consider global population ageing when developing social policies aimed at the eradication of poverty.

The disproportionate burden of financial instability experienced by older adults when compared with other age groups can be the result of many factors. This phenomenon highlights the intersectionality of poverty with demographic factors such as age and gender, as well as functional ability, education level and employment history. Older adults face unique challenges that make them more susceptible to poverty such as limited income, increases in healthcare costs, lack of access to health services, age discrimination, limited employment opportunities, and lack of social policy that protects them in times of need. Rising costs of living are also exacerbating rates of poverty in older adults, as costs of shelter and food are increasing globally.

Despite the known challenges faced by older adults, it can be difficult to conceptualize the true prevalence of poverty in older age. This is largely due to the absence of age-disaggregated data collection. Studies have shown and reported on the increased risk of poverty in older age, thus highlighting the need for greater social protection of older persons and their involvement in conversations around poverty eradication.

The 2030 Agenda, through Goal 1, specifically targets poverty eradication. The agenda recognizes that poverty is multidimensional and interconnected with other social and economic issues. While there are connections between age and higher rates of poverty, it is not age itself that leads to this relationship. Instead, it is the socially and politically created environments across the life course that lead to the systemic barriers older adults face when seeking financial stability. This highlights the need to address the relationship between age and poverty through social policy by addressing key issues such as lack of access to employment/pensions, healthcare, housing, nutrition, age-friendly environments and in some countries, inheritance and land ownership. To address the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda, utilizing inclusive social policies is necessary. This includes addressing the unique challenges and barriers faced by older adults which lead to higher rates of financial instability. Ensuring access to healthcare, affordable housing, and nutrition, as well as providing income security through fair and sustainable pension systems and/or employment are necessary to promote financial wellbeing in older age. Comprehensive healthcare systems can also be reflected through social policy, including affordable and accessible healthcare services and prescription drug coverage, which are essential to prevent health-related expenses from pushing older adults into poverty. Lastly, the
development of robust social protection services for older adults, including universal healthcare and income support programs, is crucial. These services should be designed to accommodate the diverse needs and circumstances of older individuals regardless of their location, income level, or education.

The IFA has worked to address the barriers that older adults face globally through several workstreams. These have included promoting the development of age-friendly environments which create and enable older adults to maintain independence and functional ability, including mental and physical capacity. Age-friendly environments also work to enable people who have experienced capacity loss to continue to live meaningful lives in the areas they value. Additional work has focused on identifying and removing barriers to healthcare, such as limited access to vaccinations, hearing and vision care, and inadequate opportunities for the use of integrated care strategies. By addressing these factors, older adults can gain greater financial freedom through the promotion of their independence and lessening their costs of living.

To measure the success of the efforts to eradicate poverty in older adults, it is necessary to establish a comprehensive system for monitoring and accountability. Data monitoring on the rates of poverty, costs of healthcare and costs of living, and overall quality of life for older adults should be disaggregated by age, gender, location, and other demographic features. Reporting mechanisms should also be utilised to encourage transparency and accountability on social development and the eradication of poverty. These mechanisms can also be utilized as a form of peer review, allowing others to share results and learn from the good practices of other regions and nations.

The global commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the goal of poverty eradication is a crucial first step towards creating a healthier global community, yet there is still urgently needed work in creating inclusive policies for older persons. Eradicating poverty in older adults is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic one, as older adults represent a growing demographic in the world. Fostering social development and social justice through well-designed social policies is key to accelerating progress on this important goal.

By implementing age-inclusive policies, ensuring access to healthcare, and providing social support through policy development, the lives of older adults can be improved through reduced poverty and increases in social justice and development. Monitoring mechanisms are essential to ensure that these efforts are effective and accountable. The eradication of poverty in older adults is not only a stand-alone goal but also a crucial component of the broader 2030 Agenda, and its associated call to leave no one behind.