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Statement submitted by Let’s Breakthrough, MenEngage Global Alliance and Sonke Gender Justice 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

We, Let's Breakthrough, MenEngage Global Alliance and Sonke Gender Justice, gather on this occasion to raise our collective voice alongside feminist, LGBTIQ rights, racial, youth, climate and other social justice movements, around this year's priority theme on addressing poverty, strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.

We express grave concern over the slowed progress and commitments in eliminating poverty, noting the worrisome backsliding due to COVID 19 which increased the number of people living in poverty for the first time in a generation. At the recent SDG Summit world leaders gathered to confront that Sustainable Development Goal 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere - among others, are not on track (with many SDGs falling behind). Over 575 million people worldwide continue to live in extreme poverty most of whom are women, girls and gender non-conforming peoples, especially those living in the Global South.

We call on all Governments, the United Nations agencies and the United Nations Secretary General, and on all men and boys, especially men in positions of power, to work urgently to dismantle the extractive, unequal, patriarchal powers and dominations which have long kept women and girls in all their diversities, indigenous population, gender diverse population, youth, people with disabilities and all other marginalised population around the world, particularly those in Global South regions, systematically excluded and dependent on structures that impoverish them and hold them below agreed upon levels of human rights standards and dignity.

Finally, we urgently call on all Member States to sign onto - and work towards implementing - the Feminist Decolonial Green New Deal and all of its demands.

Unpaid Care

We know that gender inequalities, economic disparities and poverty are linked. The unequal division of care work acts as one of the primary barriers to women's economic empowerment and their full personal, social and political empowerment, and relates to several women's rights violations worldwide.

Feminist economists and scholars have produced rigorous evidence for decades confirming that the burdensome aspects of care work fall disproportionately on women and girls. The scale of that inequality is staggering. Throughout the world, women and girls continue to spend two to 10 times more time than men and boys on unpaid care work, including domestic work, water and firewood collection, and caring for children and those who are ill or elderly (Pesando & Nowawark, 2015). Women make up 40% of the global formal workforce yet, on average, earn 24% less than men (Banks, 2006).

The forces threatening progress on women's human rights, gender and economic justice have been intensified by COVID-19 as well as ongoing challenges due to climate change, conflict and the rise in anti-rights backlash worldwide, leading to an increased feminization of poverty. At household level, the pandemic exposed and exacerbated patriarchal dynamics, with a documented surge in cases of men's violence against women, children and LGBTIQ people, and an increase in the burden of care work borne by women and girls (Mossie, 2016).

Achieving gender equality will require that men and boys take on their fair and equitable share of paid and unpaid care work. Increasingly, more women and girls are entering the labor market worldwide than ever before and as a consequence facing the 'double shift', increasing the need for men and boys to uptake their fair share of paid, unpaid care and household workloads. The International Men and Gender

Equality Survey (IMAGES) in 15 countries found no country where the majority of women report that their male partners ‘share routine daily childcare equally’— and men consistently reported they do more than women say they are actually doing. Research also shows that men who are more active in caring roles are healthier, happier and less violent (Letov, Greene, Kauffman & Baker, 2015). Boys and men, from early childhood, should be involved in- and expected to care for- others and themselves, and be equally responsible for routine care work inside and outside the home, whether paid or unpaid.

Work with men and boys to address unpaid care work must include advocacy towards a feminist systems change agenda that challenges patriarchal norms. In the field of engaging men and boys in gender equality, much of the work on unpaid care and domestic work has focused on redistribution, with the aim of men and boys doing their equal share in the home, with fathers and fathers-to-be being the primary focus of gender justice programming in many countries. We must also address the structural dimensions of care work, including assumptions about paid work, political work and productive work, which in the current patriarchal form, exist and operate by taking for granted a support system of care work (usually to be carried out by women and girls and as unpaid work) and increasing the value of care as a pillar of sustainable development.

Economies of Care

The need to address the structural dimensions of care and to move towards a feminist vision of green and blue economies of care, is imperative at this juncture in time. As feminists from Global South have noted, a feminist care economy calls for placing political value on activities and on the work that goes into caring, sustaining, supporting and maintaining livelihoods and wellbeing. Care is the engine needed to keep social, economic and political life functioning. People, other forms of life, natural resources and the planet require constant care in order to thrive and function at their best.

Governments have a critical role to play in advancing economies of care, and while more are implementing policy frameworks, much work is needed to meaningfully transform our political understanding and implementation of more caring strategies, policies, laws and systems across the world and as an interconnected global community. In fact, since the COVID19 crisis began, feminists have highlighted that the investment by G7 countries during the pandemic in warfare, the military industrial complex, border security and anti-terrorism is disproportionately higher to what is invested in systems of care. Many Global North countries with substantial sovereign resources need to invest more in systems of care at national level and abroad, but often choose to prioritize funding for defense, infrastructure, technology and industry, sectors that have predominantly been male-dominant and based on ideologies of extraction, competition, militarism and patriarchal power-over.

We also understand the current geo-political landscape, the financial system and neoliberal economic order as structures with their roots in patriarchal, colonial, Global North-dominated, extractive economic activities, dynamics and ideologies that continue to influence to date, the capacity of Global South countries to access the sovereign means necessary to advance gender justice, climate justice, and other essential development aims. Global South States spend disproportionate amounts of their resources on debt repayment, leaving less for investment in care. We know that ongoing austerity measures, which are often imposed by recommendation or demand of these financial institutions, drive more into poverty, as nations seek to distribute the impact of the financial contraction onto its people.

Men & boys as allies; including men in positions of power

There is an urgent need to sensitize and mobilize men and boys, especially men in positions of power, as critical citizens and advocates, alongside women and girls and people of diverse gender identities, in order to transform the systems and institutions around them and support policy change, including towards economies of care. Patriarchal masculinities that include the need to have power over others – ‘others’ being understood as women, other men, children and nature – perpetuate resources accumulation, drive militarism, propel environmental degradation and threaten livelihoods.

The current, unequal state of the economy and society is not only destroying the planet and exploiting and killing women, girls and gender non-conforming people, who disproportionately experience the burden of these injustices; the lives of men and boys too are threatened in many ways by neoliberal capitalism, especially those marginalized by forces of economic and racial oppression. Gender transformative work can help men and boys to see their own interests in the feminist systems change agenda to eliminate poverty and to advance systemic transformation to our global economic order, based on care and wellbeing.

The work of developing policy advocacy and programming to promote and support boys’ and men’s greater involvement in the agenda of economies of care and fostering care-giving norms must continue. The related demands of climate justice, economic justice and gender justice require solidarity with feminist visions of economic transformation for intersectional gender justice, to envision relations of care for each other and for the planet.
