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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 DePaul University, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes, Inc., International Association of Charities, National Council of Catholic Women, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Soroptimist International, UNANIMA International, VIVAT International, World Union of Catholic Women’s Organizations, and Worldwide Network Nigeria: Women in Development and Environment, 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 submitting organisations represent the Working Group to End Homelessness (WGEH), a group of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, which advocates at the United Nations for persons who are homeless, to pursue the human right to adequate housing for all, and to end homelessness, so that all people can realize their full human rights and potential, and flourish. Dedicated to the elimination of homelessness in all its forms as described in [A/RES/76/133](#) and [E/RES/2020/7](#) para 7, and responding to the Secretary-General's recent call for more action on homelessness in his report [A/78/236](#), the Working Group works with the United Nations, global platforms to end homelessness, academic centers, and individuals who are concerned as well as those who have experienced homelessness to devise solutions and call for change.

The Working Group recognizes that women and girls constitute a significant, though less visible, percentage of homelessness, and due to universal gender inequality, their circumstances demand additional attention and actions. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5 – achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls; Goal 1 – ending poverty in all its forms, everywhere; and Goal 11 – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; demands that we leave no one behind. Similarly, full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women requires explicit attention to homelessness and housing discrimination and exclusion of women and girls. For example, Member States must address customary and traditional laws that deny women the right to inheritance, land and property. It is therefore critical that global progress and the tools that support it encompass the vulnerable population of homeless women and girls.

We join in this statement to urge the 68th Commission on the Status of Women to address homelessness in the exploration of 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. Around the world, poverty is one of the primary drivers of homelessness. In 2019, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Human Settlements Programme convened an Expert Group Meeting on the theme of Affordable Housing and Social Protection Systems for All to Address Homelessness. The resulting report stated, “Inequality has not only persisted but increased, and considerable numbers of people within countries are left living in extreme or near poverty and excluded from full participation in economic, social, and political life. Homelessness is one of the manifestations of this inequality.” These preparations led the 58th Commission on Social Development to conclude, “poverty has various forms and dimensions, including homelessness and living in inadequate housing.”

A 2020 study from the United Nations Development Programme and the Pardee Center for International Futures at the University of Denver projects that, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional 207 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty by 2030, bringing the total number to more than one billion. These levels of poverty have not been seen since 2005. Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 must focus on strategies to reduce poverty, and specifically homelessness as a particular manifestation of poverty. Poverty cannot be reduced without specifically addressing homelessness, and vice versa.

Women and girls face particular challenges in experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. Women and girls face practical trials in managing menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth without having their own homes and regular access to health, hygiene, and well-being practices. Women and girls are more at risk for

exploitation and labour and sex trafficking while experiencing homelessness, vulnerable to gender-based violence and high levels of trauma. As a result of limited alternatives, women and girls may turn to sex work and become further stigmatized and criminalized. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Slavery recently highlighted the particular intersection of women and girls' homelessness and trafficking in his report [A/HRC/54/30](#). Further barriers and discrimination in accessing employment, education and training, may lengthen the time in which women and girls remain homeless or inadequately housed. In some countries, women and girls are unable to inherit land or property, and driven into homelessness or housing insecurity when their husband or father passes away or disowns them.

Rising housing costs and stagnant wages combine to create increasingly unaffordable housing and push women towards homelessness. Many women live just one crisis or paycheck away from homelessness. A survey of countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development showed “households spend the largest share of their budget on housing, relative to all other household budget items; this holds true for low-, middle- and high-income households. While many households struggle to afford housing, low-income dwellers are particularly overburdened by housing costs.”

In a 2015 study of young women experiencing homelessness in Ethiopia, extreme poverty with the most frequently cited cause; many of the women left home in order to take financial pressure off their family by seeking to provide for themselves. In a 2016 study of children experiencing homelessness in Preah Sihanouk, Cambodia, more than 80% of the children stated that poverty was the primary reason for their homelessness.

In order to construct effective policies and solutions to the homelessness and housing precarity of women and girls, it is crucial that we are inclusive of the voices and perspectives of women and girls who have the lived experience of homelessness.

Universal cash payments is one poverty-reduction strategy that is newly being applied to the issue of homelessness. Universal cash payments “would provide a buffer against homelessness by ensuring that people have a stable source of income that is not affected by one’s able-bodiedness or labor market noninvolvement, nor would it be terminated due to changes in life circumstances (e.g., acquisition of a job, improvement in an episodic mental illness).”

In his report [A/78/192](#), the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing notes that there is a global crisis of housing affordability, that “financialization has transformed housing from a fundamental social necessity into an investment tool” and calls for “robust intervention in housing and land markets, social housing creation, and tax policy adjustments to enhance affordability, in particular in relation to women, [and] persons experiencing homelessness.”

Agenda 2030 has many interlinkages that, when comprehensively addressed, will see gains across gender equality, reduction of poverty, improved social protection systems, and housing and homelessness, and allow us to better achieve the Goals. We urge Member States and the 68th Commission on the Status of Women to:

- explicitly mention homelessness as a specific dimension of women’s poverty; recognize the high levels of overlap between gender equality, poverty, social protection systems, and homelessness;
- recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, driven high rates of poverty, and provides us with the opportunity for radical transformation;

- adopt a human-rights based approach, recognizing the full humanity and dignity of women and girls experiencing poverty, and homelessness, and empower them to participate in the design of policies and programmes that affect them;
  - expand social protection floors or prioritize the application of social protection floors for women who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness;
  - recognize that women's poverty and homelessness are driven by policy and economic choices, and apply a gender lens to national housing policies; to eviction policies; to state support, subsidies and tax policies and other financing strategies for housing sector development; to rent regulation, vacancy control and housing subsidies; to land use and inheritance policies; and to subsidized housing waiting lists and prioritization protocols;
  - undertake a comprehensive set of interlocking strategies ranging from physical and mental healthcare; education, training, and employment opportunities; homelessness prevention programmes; and a wide variety of housing and services options for women experiencing poverty and homelessness including trauma-informed care; and
  - collect, analyze, and report on disaggregated data and housing affordability and programme outcomes, including establishing global targets to end homelessness within the Sustainable Development Goal framework under Goal 1 and Goal 11, so that we can continue to learn and adapt towards even more effective policy and programmes for women and girls experiencing homelessness, whose unique needs and experiences are often overlooked.
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