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Statement submitted by **UNANIMA 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

UNANIMA International, together with our endorsers, welcomes the 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* as the Priority Theme for the 62nd Commission for Social Development. UNANIMA International is a nongovernmental organization with consultative status at the United Nations since 2005. We in UNANIMA International advocate for the principles of social justice, promoting gender equality and the rights of women, children, and girls. Working together as 25 organizations of women religious in over 100 countries, we work towards making the world a better place for all through advocacy, collaboration, education, and action. In recent years, UNANIMA International has focused on the issue of homelessness/displacement, and what can be done to break the cycles of poverty that affect our planet's most vulnerable people.

The issue of homelessness is more relevant now than ever as we see millions of people around the world displaced by conflict, climate, and economic conditions. At the end of 2022, the United Nations Refugee Agency estimated that 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide due to persecution, violence, or human rights violations. 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year. Perhaps displaying poverty in its most visible form, global homelessness remains one of the most extreme and growing manifestations of inequality, social exclusion, and disregard for human rights. Less visible, however, are the women, children, and girls experiencing homelessness, and the different forms that homelessness can take depending on the context. We know firsthand from our research and conversations with those at the grassroots that homelessness is often hidden, and the lack of decision-making power and agency displayed in experiences of homelessness is compounded for vulnerable women, children, girls, and families.

Social justice requires that these inequalities be addressed through the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges in society. It is grounded in the principles of equality and human rights, and it seeks to promote fairness, inclusivity, and respect for all individuals regardless of their race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Equality is a core principle of social justice, which emphasizes that everyone should have access to the same opportunities and resources, especially the most marginalized in our societies. Human rights are also integral to social justice, as every individual has the right to dignity, freedom, and respect. When social justice is prioritized, these principles are upheld, and widespread systemic inequalities like poverty and homelessness are addressed.

Advocacy continues to be essential in promoting social justice. When we prioritize social justice and commit to sustained systemic change, we can transform our communities and build a better future for all people, including those typically left behind. Furthermore, the promotion and empowerment of social justice activists and champions, especially women and youth with lived experience, creates inclusive space for diverse perspectives and experiences on the world stage. Women and youth experiencing poverty and homelessness are often marginalized further through social and cultural prejudice and the lack of access to appropriate resources and social protections. This contributes to the invisibility of these populations, continuing the cycle of inequality and poverty whereby intersecting vulnerabilities are confounded and deepened. Social development and social justice therefore require

acknowledging and understanding the specific experiences of those living at the margins of society which are often unseen, underexamined, and underreported.

True eradication of both homelessness and poverty necessitates breaking the cycle perpetuated by the insufficient and incomplete paradigm we currently approach homelessness and displacement with. A more nuanced understanding of the experiences of individuals and families in these contexts is necessary to inform effective policymaking and community engagement. Framing displaced populations and those experiencing homelessness as threats to national security, independent crises in need of humanitarian response, or individual cases of personal failure allows governments, institutions, and communities to displace responsibility, resulting in reactionary and partial solutions and ultimately little substantive support for those most disproportionately impacted. Homelessness and displacement should not be seen as a personal failure but rather as the structural failure and human rights violation that they are.

Inequality in all its forms reflects this structural failure and remains a key challenge of our time. The Global Wealth Report 2023 by Credit Suisse and UBS indicates that wealth inequality reached new highs around the world this year. According to a recent United Nations report, rising inequality now affects more than two-thirds of people worldwide and is growing for more than 70% of the global population. The gap between the rich and the poor is a well-documented problem within and between countries, and this structural economic disparity continues to widen at both national and international levels. Of course economic inequalities in income and wealth are not the only form of inequality which contribute to the cycle of poverty globally, and other manifestations include social inequalities in health, adequate housing, education, and access to social protection; gender and racial inequalities; and barriers to political participation (especially for those experiencing homelessness). Each violates and inhibits widely shared values of social justice, equitable and social development, empowerment, and peaceful coexistence.

Significant to both the Global North and the Global South, the issues of homelessness and displacement underpin and can hinder the success of all Sustainable Development Goals. There is a shared responsibility here to play an individual and collective role in taking these seemingly local issues to global levels. Homelessness and displacement transcend national borders and have far-reaching implications at every level, demanding cooperation rather than competition. Thus, we must keep a multilateral focus on homelessness to encourage all political actors' engagement with the issue. Civil society organizations, private sectors, government agencies (regional and international), and other stakeholders who sit together and design policies and plans must first and foremost support the development of the community, building ownership from the community perspective to empower and foster social justice.

As a global community we must commit to inclusive policies and programs to address poverty, homelessness, inequality, and social development. Both wide reaching and locally specific these may take a variety of forms, but the inclusion of lived experience in their development is essential to avoid reaffirming processes and discourses which justify and deepen local and global inequalities. Women and youth-led social justice movements have been instrumental in propelling political transformation around the world, yet too often women, girls, and all those with lived experiences are left behind in policy- and decision-making. Accordingly, UNANIMA International ask that the following recommendations be considered to promote an inclusive, gender-sensitive agenda for fostering social

justice in relation to the overarching goal of poverty eradication, and that these approaches be adopted in a holistic, transparent, inclusive, and intersectional manner:

- Implement and invest in policies that reduce inequalities through a Human Rights-Based Approach, including but not limited to universal health care, quality education, labor rights, and adequate housing.
- Implement and invest in policies which address displacement and relocation, taking into consideration children's education access and women's and girls' access to clean water, different cultural norms and protocols, sustainability of the shelter, access to energy technology and other resources that can improve livelihood, among others.
- Align national policies with international law and agendas, including the United Nations 20230 Agenda for which "greater gains will be made by addressing all SDGs together."
- Emphasize a transformative response to inequalities at all levels – from the grassroots to global governance - and the need for transformative knowledge for a just world.
- Implement policies that ensure people with lived experience of homelessness and poverty are involved in the design and provision of related services, and development of plans to address and prevent root causes.
- Establish and convene on an international definition of homelessness that is specific enough to address the issue but also general enough to encompass all aspects, including differences between cultures, genders, etc. Collect disaggregated data, including specifically on families at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.

Endorsed by:

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