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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 Soroptimist 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

Soroptimist International and the signatories of this statement recognise the dire rates of poverty globally and that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by poverty, with an estimated 388 million women and girls living in extreme poverty in 2022, according to UN Women.

We challenge Member States to focus on three key areas to achieve social justice, and ultimately, to eradicate poverty globally: education, decent work, and social protection. We must recognise that effective and comprehensive social protection is not only essential to achieve social justice and decent work, but it is vital for creating a sustainable and resilient future. The meaningful inclusion of all women and girls in all aspects of public life has been statistically proven to advance economies, realise social cohesion, and contribute to sustainable and peaceful communities.

1. Education

Education is a transformative tool to achieve social justice, especially for women and girls, and has been proven to reduce gender inequality.

Education is a universal human right that must be upheld, and Member States must abide by their commitment to it. Basic literacy rates are still the lowest among women and girls, particularly older and rural women, which highlights the need for access to lifelong quality education. Lifelong learning equips people with essential skills that are necessary to increasing access to the labour force, and in turn, contributing to economic growth. Education is also essential for delaying marriage and keeping girls in school, with child, early and forced marriage and unions often resulting from and further driving girls' lack of educational opportunities.

For millions of women and girls around the world access to education, a fundamental human right, has been impeded by various barriers – cultural, economic, and political. Therefore, each time women and girls are excluded from education, opportunities for entire generations and potential solutions to the world's problems are lost. It is therefore in the interest of Member States to fully commit to and invest in quality education that is accessible to all. This requires investing in human capital, including skilled teachers, as well as investments in safe and accessible schools, technology, and high-quality teaching materials.

COVID-19 resulted in changes to the way we work. Access to digital technology is now a necessity and Member States should commit to financing digital literacy training, affordable internet access, and internet safety measures. Fully funded gender-transformative programmes must be implemented to expand women and girls' participation in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) to reach gender parity and equal opportunities to work in the field.

2. Decent work

Wealth and income inequalities have continued to increase both within and between countries, disproportionately affecting women and girls in all their diversity. Decent work and productive employment in safe environments are key elements to eradicating poverty and ensuring that all women and girls can contribute meaningfully to society, including at the highest level. The International Labour Organisation Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) must be ratified by all States, and this includes the implementation of strict zero tolerance policies in the workplace. States must recognise that, given their unique lived experiences, women have the potential to propel societies towards social justice as much as men – but this can only happen if they feel safe at work.

Equal pay for work of equal value must be implemented without reservation. The gender pay gap remains a reality and continues to unfairly impact women. Bridging this persistent gap is essential to tackling deeply rooted gender inequalities in the workplace and widespread, systemic misogyny.

Unpaid care work remains a significant challenge for women and girls who continue to act as primary caregivers of children and families. The persisting care crisis is a gender crisis that hampers positive social development and any progress towards gender equality. States must adopt inclusive strategies to recognise, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work. They must allocate resources to respond to the growing need for childcare and care for older persons. In addition, care work must be viewed as a shared role for caregivers in every context. Gendered patterns of women's inability to access pensions often stems from their exclusion from waged work throughout their life course, including unpaid care work. Inclusive parenting policies, such as paid parental leave for both parents, is an essential first step to tackling the care crisis.

3. Social Protection

Social protection systems, according to the United Nations, include social assistance, social insurance, and labour market programmes. They have the effect of empowering women and girls in all their diversity by enabling their access to quality education and work. Social protection floors, as nationally defined, serve to guarantee the most basic needs and income security.

States should recognise and implement existing social protection agreements. To be protected is a right stated in Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed by the Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202) of the International Labour Conference in 2012. The implementation of universal social protection system floors is an essential step to alleviating poverty by ensuring that the most basic human rights are fulfilled. Despite progress in the extension of social protection particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the right to social security is not yet a reality for most of the world's population; and expanded social protection packages have been uneven, which has deepened existing inequalities. According to the International Labour Organisation, only 47 per cent of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit, while the remaining 53 per cent – 4.1 billion people – remain completely unprotected.

In addition, investments in universal healthcare, including access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, adequate and affordable housing, and low-cost nutritious food are essential to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Such investments,

alongside access to quality education, can put women and girls on a positive footing to empower and enable them to work towards a self-sustaining future.

Key Asks

Crucially, none of this can take effect if we do not act on the alarming climate crisis that continues to destroy and negatively impact entire communities. It has been well documented that the climate crisis disproportionately impacts and severely compromises the overall wellbeing of women and girls.

Soroptimist International and all signatories of this statement recognise that education, decent work and social protection are key factors to accelerating progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty globally. Women and girls, while among the most impacted by poverty, can play a key role in working to eradicate the issue. It is only through the implementation of lifelong educational opportunities and social protection systems that gender parity and social inclusion can be fully guaranteed.

We are faced with a poly-crisis which clearly illustrates that the time for inclusive, gender-sensitive and human-rights driven policies and decision-making is now. As a global community, we must embrace our humanity to educate, empower, and enable one another, because we can effect positive change when we are given the necessary resources and opportunities. The rights of all women and girls must be at the forefront of these decisions and policies: social justice can never be achieved if women and girls, who account for 49.7 per cent of the global population are left behind. Multilateral cooperation is needed now more than ever to achieve social justice and sustainable social development.

Soroptimist International and all signatories of this statement call on all Member States and stakeholders to:

- Apply a gender-sensitive and human-rights based approach to all policies, legislations, discussions, and decisions related to all aspects of social development;
- Implement opportunities for quality, safe, gender-transformative lifelong education, including access to all levels of education and including for all girls and women;
- Invest in human and social capital which underpin quality education fit for purpose in the 21st century, including digital learning;
- Ratify International Labour Organisation Convention 190 on the elimination of violence in the world of work, to promote women's and girls' access to education, training and careers;
- Bridge the gender pay gap by providing equal pay for work of equal value between men and women and establishing non-discriminatory liveable wages throughout the life course;
- Recognise care as a societal responsibility and adopt inclusive strategies to shift resources to respond to the growing need for childcare and care for older persons;
- Measure and prioritise the wellbeing of women and girls beyond GDP by deploying multidimensional indicators to ensure quality, disaggregated data collection;
- Implement universal social protection system floors to alleviate poverty by ensuring that human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled; and

- Invest in specific, long-term and gender-sensitive training programmes and partnerships to enable women and girls to actively contribute to societies.

As a global community, we are at a turning point and remain far from achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. States must place the highest priority on empowering and enabling all women and girls to actively and meaningfully contribute to sustainable development via education, decent work, and universal social protection systems.

Co-signs:

Associated Country Women of the World
 Catholic International Education Office
 Centrs Marta
 Congregation of the Mission
 Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas
 Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage
 Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate
 International Council of Women
 International Federation of Business and Professional Women
 International Health Awareness Network
 International Presentation Association
 Make Mothers Matter
 Mothers Legacy Project
 National Alliance of Women's Organizations
 National Council of Women of Canada
 Passionists International
 Red Dot Foundation
 Regards de Femmes
 Servas International
 Sikh Human Rights Group
 Sisters of Charity Federation
 Society for the Advancement of Global Understanding
 Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Limited
 Soroptimist International South East Asia Pacific
 Sveriges Kvinnolobby
 United for Equity and Ending Racism
 Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, Inc.
 Women's Federation for World Peace International
 Women's International Zionist Organization
 Worldwide Network Nigeria: Women in Development and Environment
 Zonta International