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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 that rates of poverty globally have exponentially increased as a result of intersecting crises. We also recognise that all women and girls are among those most impacted but poverty and gender inequality are not inevitable. Poverty and gender inequality are the result of structural discrimination which has been at the heart of law and policy for decades. In line with UN General Assembly Resolution 74/235, we must strive for justice through a gender lens which is inclusive of social justice, economic justice, climate justice, and legal justice. The intersection of these issues imposes heavy penalties on all women and girls.

1. Social Justice

a) Education

Education plays a transformative role as a driver for sustainable development, peace, equality, and social justice at large. Access to quality, lifelong education empowers and equips all women and girls with the essential skills required to access the labour force and develop self-sustaining futures, and is an important protection against child, early and forced marriage and unions.

With the shift to online learning and working since the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for universal access to the internet and digital technologies is essential to realising gender equality. The digital gender divide must be bridged through increased government investment in national electricity grids, digital technologies, digital literacy training and lifelong learning for all women and girls. Fully funded programmes must be implemented to expand all women and girls' participation in science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM) to reach gender parity and equal opportunities to work in the field. High priority should be placed on those at risk of being left behind, including rural and indigenous women and girls, those living through conflict, refugees and internally displaced persons, and women and girls in care and state institutions.

b) Universal Healthcare

The World Health Organisation's definition of universal healthcare is based on principles of equity, yet gender equality in healthcare remains a real challenge. Women and girls living in particularly vulnerable situations lack access to basic quality healthcare, hygiene, sanitation, and face increased risks of exposure to disease because of unsafe water. Healthy ageing must be promoted across the life course, including through action as part of the Decade of Healthy Ageing and ensuring universal health coverage is fit for all women and girls. Critical health services and education must be made available to all women and girls, with specific priority placed on young girls, rural women, indigenous women, women with disabilities, and women of childbearing age. This is essential to protecting their health and wellbeing by reducing stigma, increasing decision-making autonomy, and providing quality information on diseases like cervical cancer.

2. Economic Justice

Wealth and income inequalities have continued to increase both within and between countries and disproportionately impact all women and girls, contributing to increasing levels of poverty. In addition, intended financial support at the local level is not reaching them. The methodology on disbursing/allocating funds has to change, enabling them, not giving them more administrative burden.

a) Gender Pay Gap

Equal pay for work of equal value must be implemented without reservation. The gender pay gap remains a reality in most countries and has been on the rise again because of the way post-Covid wage compensations have been framed and implemented (see recent EU report) - and continues to unfairly impact women. Establishing non-discriminatory liveable wages is an essential first step to women's participation in full, equal, and meaningful paid work. Furthermore, women should be considered for all positions of employment, including at the highest level. States must recognise that, given their unique lived experiences, women have the potential to drive innovation and propel societies towards social and economic justice.

b) Unpaid Care Work

Unpaid care work and unpaid work done for public services like water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) remains a significant challenge for women and girls who continue to work as the primary caregivers of children and families. The persisting care crisis is a gender crisis that impedes positive intergenerational development and progress towards gender equality. States must adopt inclusive strategies to recognise, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work and allocate sufficient resources to respond to the growing need for childcare and care for older persons.

All care work must be recognised as valued work deserving of remuneration. Inclusive parenting policies like paid parental leave for both parents are a critical starting point to tackling the care crisis.

No child should have to participate in care work in lieu of learning and developing: shifting social narratives can increase access to education for all women and girls, providing them with equal opportunities to learn from a young age. As well as working to address embedded social ideologies and gendered stereotypes on care work, it is the responsibility of States to commit to investing in inclusive, lifelong education, to empower and enable all women and girls with equal opportunities in paid employment.

c) Pensions

Gendered income poverty is a real issue that can have catastrophic implications to the health, wellbeing and status of older women. In a context of gendered labour markets, contributory pension systems face challenges to guarantee universal and adequate pension benefits for women. Over their life course, women spend longer periods dedicated to caregiving, lower labour market participation, more part-time work and lower earnings than men. These components compromise their pension entitlements in pension systems that link benefits to paid work, contributions and earnings. States must recognise the lack of access to an equitable pension for women as a genuine problem contributing to poverty, and act immediately.

Social protection system floors must be implemented to ensure basic income throughout the life course, including at pension age. States are required to ensure that all women and girls have fair and equitable structures for lifelong contributions, including times when they are working as unpaid carers, to ensure financial security throughout their life course. Social development policies must be underpinned by basic human rights that guarantee the full protection of women of all ages. When women and girls are included in social protection systems, they can positively contribute as part of the solution to achieving economic justice.

3. Climate Justice

No integrated justice can be achieved without climate justice and the guarantee of a safe, healthy, and sustainable planet. Research has highlighted that unless climate change is curbed, it will drive up to 130 million more people into poverty in the next decade and displace up to 3 billion people by the end of this century. Climate migrants face heightened barriers to accessing basic healthcare, safe water and sanitation, education, food security, and shelter. In addition, all women and girls face accentuated risks of gender-based

violence, trafficking, and child, early and forced marriage and unions, placing them in particularly vulnerable situations.

Empowering women and girls to take a central role in developing innovative solutions is crucial to improving community responses to the climate crisis. This can be done by enhancing their participation, decision-making, and leadership in climate change mitigation, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction strategies. Gender-sensitive humanitarian relief is vital to ensure the wellbeing and dignity of all women and girls during and post-disaster. States must commit to fully implementing the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration which holds at its core respect for the rule of law, due process and universal access to justice. It is also critical that States fulfil their legally binding commitments agreed upon in the 2015 Paris Agreement and following Declarations. All new investments in fossil fuels must be halted immediately; and a swift, just transition to clean, renewable energies must be implemented.

4. Legal Justice

To achieve social, economic and climate justice, universal human rights must be fully respected, protected, and fulfilled in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

A disconnected approach to social, economic, and environmental policies has not produced the desired results towards poverty eradication and reducing inequality. Policies on economic, social, and environmental development should therefore be interconnected to ensure that people, in particular women and children living in poverty and other vulnerable situations, benefit from inclusive economic growth and development. Crucially, all policies and legislation must hold gender inclusivity and human rights at their core to ensure equal protection for all, in accordance with international law.

We also draw attention to the recommendations of UN Women that address some of these issues and call for Member States to support these.

5. Key Asks

Soroptimist International and the signatories of this statement recognise that achieving social, economic, environmental and legal justice are crucial to accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

We demand that Member States and stakeholders:

- Apply a gender-sensitive and human rights-based approach to all policies, legislation, discussions, and decisions related to all aspects of development;
- Increase investments in quality education and lifelong learning, and create specific, targeted programmes, including on digital technology and literacy at both secondary and tertiary level, and science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM) subjects and careers, focused on enabling all women and girls into paid work, education and training;
- Establish and implement laws and policies that regulate technology, ensuring that they apply a gender-transformative approach and contribute to the achievement of gender equality and the eradication of gender-based violence, including online violence;
- 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;
- Adopt inclusive, universal healthcare via increased investments in quality healthcare provisions, staffing, training, and community education programmes;

- Bridge the gender pay gap by providing equal pay for work of equal value between men and women and establishing non-discriminatory liveable wages;
- Ensure that care work is recognised as a valued job and can contribute to pensions;
- Implement inclusive parenting policies like paid parental leave for both parents;
- Ensure appropriate and quality disaggregated data collection;
- Sign, ratify and implement the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration as well as all other international agreements that protect the rights of migrants;
- Place a higher priority on increasing women's participation, decision-making and leadership in climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies;
- Fulfil legally binding commitments agreed upon in the 2015 Paris Agreement, and further Declarations; and
- Ratify and remove all reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Co-signs:

Association d'Aide à l'Education de l'Enfant Handicapé
 Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas
 Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage
 Graduate Women International
 Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate
 International Alliance of Women
 International Association of Applied Psychology
 International Association of Charities
 International Council of Jewish Women
 International Council of Women
 International Federation of Business and Professional Women
 International Health Awareness Network
 International Inner Wheel
 International Presentation Association
 Make Mothers Matter
 National Alliance of Women's Organizations
 NGO Coordination post Beijing Switzerland
 Passionists International
 Red Dot Foundation
 Regards de Femmes
 Servas International
 Sikh Human Rights Group
 Sisters of Charity Federation
 Soka Gakkai International
 Soroptimist International of Europe
 Tandem Project, The
 United for Equity and Ending Racism
 Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, Inc.
 Women for Water Partnership
 Women's Federation for World Peace International
 Women's International Zionist Organization
 Worldwide Network Nigeria: Women in Development and Environment
 Zonta International