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**General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further
implementation of the Programme of Action of the
International Conference on Population and Development
at the global, regional and national levels**

**3 (b): Population, food security, nutrition and
sustainable development**

Statement submitted by Action by Churches Together (ACT Alliance), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council²

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.

¹ [E/CN.9/2020/1](#).

² The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Action by Churches Together (ACT Alliance) is a coalition of 155 churches and church-related organisations working together in over 125 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards. ACT Alliance is faith-motivated, rights-based, impact-focused, committed to working ecumenically and inter-religiously, with the communities we seek to serve and accompany at the centre of our work.

As networks of churches and Christian faith-based organisations working for decades for human rights, development and humanitarian purposes around the world, we are engaged in all pillars of the Programme of Action (PoA) of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICDP). We affirm that all people are created in the image of God, with equal dignity and rights. We believe that reducing inequalities across economic, food, and education systems, as well as gender equality and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, is a prerequisite for ensuring human rights and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. We re-affirm the integrated, holistic mandate of the ICPD agenda as well as the outcomes of its review conferences. ACT Alliance also commits to stand up for the integrity of the United Nations and the importance of multilateralism and cooperation at times of polarisation. This will be done by continual engagement at the ICPD and Beijing+25 processes in local, regional and global policy arenas, and by scaling up efforts to implement the ACT Alliance Gender Justice Policy.

We welcome the Commission's theme of population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development. The right to health cannot be separated from the right to food, and access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services and information is one component in breaking intergenerational cycles of malnutrition. The linkages of pregnancy during adolescence, child marriage and lack of access to SRHR information and services to factors such as higher levels of complications during pregnancy and childbirth and higher maternal and infant malnutrition with serious health and developmental risks are well known. A holistic approach is needed to address the intersection between gender equality, food security and SRHR.

Gender discrimination is a critical element in access to adequate nutrition and food. Gender determines access to adequate food and nutrition at household level when women and girls are the last to eat. Sexuality is another factor. Many women who are single, widowed or divorced, too young or too old, often are not eligible for participation in food subsidy schemes. Those who sell sex and sexual minority groups face the same discrimination.

Women are major food producers and often responsible for feeding their children. However, they face many obstacles in providing for their families. They lack both employment opportunities for income generation and access to and control over land, knowledge and technologies for developing their potential as farmers. Additionally, they may lack the power to negotiate sexual and reproductive choices with their partners. Increased access to social services, access to land, employment opportunities and equal decision-making power in the household leads to increased autonomy for women, giving them the capacity to make decisions on the use of time and resources in all spheres of life.

From a Christian perspective, the inability of even one person to obtain their daily bread is an affront to the God-given human dignity of all. The majority of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition live in rural areas, where food is produced. While high food prices have been the main triggers of food crises, they go together with structural problems such as food price volatility and failed national and

international policies. Further attention must be drawn to the structural causes that underlie both the vulnerability of the world's smallholder food producers to climate change, as well as the contribution of the industrial agricultural sector to climate change and environmental degradation.

It is also vital to recognise the enormous potential of small-scale agro-ecological farming systems to contribute to global food security and sustainable development in a world constrained by climate change. Evidence has shown that if small-scale farmers have sufficient access to land, water, credit, advisory services and equipment, their productivity per hectare and per unit of energy use is higher than in large intensive farming systems. Successful adaptation strategies must put environmental protection and socio-economic rights at the core of all interventions and actions to disseminate new technologies and practices. Using a justice and equality lens will ensure that adaptation strategies address issues such as gender equality, land rights, farmers' rights, biodiversity protection and - most importantly - fair and equal access to and control over resources, including for indigenous people. The connection and claim to land, by private sector, state actor or religious actor, bears a resemblance to the claim and rule over the sovereignty over bodies.

ACT Alliance is committed to explore the links between sexual and reproductive rights, food and nutrition security in the context of sustainable development further. We know that the achievement of sexual and reproductive rights positively affects the right to adequate food and nutrition and related rights. Thus, we will strengthen our efforts to connect the different issues in a holistic way. Churches and faith-based organisations provide critical service provision at the community level and have access to marginalised communities where even governments have difficulty in ensuring an institutional presence. At the same time, we acknowledge that there are social, religious and cultural controversies surrounding issues important to this agenda and that subsequent inaction in addressing them has a detrimental impact on social equity and sustainable development. ACT affirms our responsibility as churches and faith-based organisations to promote each person's inherent dignity and right as part of the divine creation, as well as to promote rigorous analysis of the impact of religious and customary systems on issues like child, early and forced marriage, as in many parts of the world religious family law trumps statutory legislation.

Engaging with faith actors in addressing these issues is crucial. Lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, maternal health and access to services for youth, means that women and girls are dying. Everyone should have the ability to decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. This also entails not leaving behind men and boys, both as they are key in promoting and protecting human rights and gender equality as decision-makers and power-holders, and because they are subjected to harmful imposed masculinities. Churches and faith communities deliver family planning, youth services and other sexual and reproductive health services and also help to challenge patriarchal attitudes and practices by promoting gender equality at all levels of society, engaging men and boys in their activities and promoting transformative masculinities. As such, faith-based organisations are crucial partners in attaining Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality as well as Goal 3 on health.

Based on our experiences we commit to examining our own organisations and structures as well as strongly calling upon Member States to:

1. Fully fulfil previous commitments and implement the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its subsequent reviews with no regression or exception and urge other states to do

likewise. This encompasses non-regression on previously agreed language, including reference to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

2. Stand up for the integrity of the United Nations and the importance of multilateralism, rejecting extreme polarisation and fragmentation and embracing cooperation.

3. Develop and implement national plans to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, with particular reference to Goal 3 and Goal 5 and all targets related to gender, Goal 10 on reducing inequalities, and, pertaining to this Commission, SDG 2 to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

4. Integrate nutrition into family planning programmes to achieve healthier pregnancies and birth outcomes, reduce rates of stunting, wasting, and child, infant and maternal mortality especially among adolescents, and integrate family planning into nutrition programmes to reduce rates of adolescent pregnancy and the significant health risks this poses to both mother and child.

5. Engage in partnership, in line with Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda, with churches and faith-based organisations as transformative actors to change social norms and promote social equality; and recognise the role of faith as a positive force to promote change in society, holding important ethical values that promote abundant life and dignity of all human beings with justice, compassion and love at its core.

6. Protect and fulfil the human rights of all persons, regardless of nationality, migration status, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, ethnicity or any other intersecting identity, including respect and recognition of indigenous people whose lands are often used for large scale food production.
