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### Commission for Social Development

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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: promoting empowerment of people in achieving  
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and  
decent work for all**

### **Statement submitted by Dianova International, a non-governmental organization in special 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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\* [E/CN.5/2013/L.2](#).



## **Statement**

### **Homeless, powerless**

#### **Having a safe roof over one's head is a prerequisite for escaping from poverty**

Poverty weighs heavily on countries' economies. It represents a loss of revenue and a burden on the public purse. When a country, whether an industrialized or a developing one, fails to give every one of its citizens the means to achieve his or her full potential – or at least to live without depending too heavily on the public purse – it denies itself a potential resource for the future. No one can contribute fully to the socioeconomic development of his or her country without having at least the assurance of a safe place to live.

The report by Canada's National Council of Welfare (2011), entitled "The Dollars and Sense of Solving Poverty", has addressed this issue in depth. The report highlights the financial cost of short-term approaches to poverty and homelessness, compared to a longer-term investment approach that involves, in particular, the provision of supportive housing. Right now in our country, a homeless person costs the community at least \$40,000 a year, an amount that can go as high as \$120,000 if the person is in trouble with the law, while the annual cost of supervised housing services amounts to only \$15,000.

These figures show clearly that the more resources we devote to preventing poverty and homelessness and to measures geared directly to helping people escape from poverty, the more we reduce the indirect costs to the public purse (the health system, the judicial system, and so forth).

Dianova is an international organization that seeks to empower people who are at-risk. In Canada, it is active mainly in Quebec. For nearly 30 years now, it has sponsored residential programs for the prevention and treatment of addictions, focusing primarily on substance abuse (narcotics, alcohol and drugs). In Quebec, Dianova has been involved since 2009 in developing social housing programs with community support, as part of the national effort to combat poverty and homelessness.

Despite the public authorities' distaste for social housing, which they see as an additional short-term expense, Dianova has persisted in its determination to offer vulnerable persons a safe place of residence, which is an essential condition if they are ever to be able to fulfil their potential..

In Canada, there seems to be no long-term economic vision of poverty and homelessness. The government encourages people to save; it keeps putting out messages about sound economic behaviour, prudence and constancy in household financial management. Yet the same government is passing up potential savings estimated at \$7 billion a year! In fact, while a 2007 study by the Sheldon Chumir Foundation estimated at between 4 and 6 billion dollars the combined cost of emergency shelter, health care, criminal justice and social services for the homeless, a more recent report, "The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013" (Gaetz, Stephen; Donaldson, Jesse; Ritcher, Tim; & Gulliver, Tanya), updated that figure to 7 billion dollars! The report added that "homelessness is expensive because we cycle people through (...) increasingly costly and uncoordinated emergency services systems. By

shifting focus to permanent solutions, we have the opportunity to reduce the long-term cost of homelessness.”

Any action to reduce poverty is both laudable and desirable. Dianova offers many outpatient services to support the communities in which our agency is involved. Yet, throughout our 30 years of experience, of all the enlightening rehabilitations we have witnessed, of all the cases of socially disconnected individuals who became solid citizens, surely the most remarkable are those utterly destitute homeless persons who have succeeded in turning their lives around and contributing fully to the economic and social growth of their community.

As a non-governmental organization dedicated to empowering individuals and communities, Dianova is calling for a coordinated and long-term investment in reducing poverty.

By giving people a roof over their heads, through coordinated investments in social housing, by giving them the means to devote their energies to something beyond their mere survival, we will give them the chance to contribute to society and to the economy.

Poverty costs a lot – and decision-makers are too often content to pay only for its consequences. By contrast, an investment-based model represents a choice that not only makes sense in human terms but offers real returns as well. By tackling the causes of poverty, society as a whole will reap the fruits.

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