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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: strategies for the eradication of poverty to
achieve sustainable development for all**

Statement submitted by Graduate Women International, Soroptimist International, and Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, non-governmental organizations 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

Education as a strategy to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development for all

Issue:

According to the United Nations 836 million people are living in extreme poverty today. GWI notes, and expresses deep concern, about the high level of poverty found throughout the world. While there is no international consensus on measurement guidelines for poverty, when determining and measuring poverty levels, UNESCO's research incorporates components such as lack of assets, social exclusion, humiliation, economic, social, and political aspects. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere" explicitly recognises that poverty results not from one cause but from many different interrelated factors that together lead to the state of poverty.

GWI recognises that all aspects must be addressed in order to reduce poverty with an emphasis on quality education. While there has been a reduction in global poverty since the Millennium Development Goals, poverty levels still remain unacceptably high and an increase in extreme poverty for older women, youth, the disabled and the unschooled can be seen. The correlation between lack of education and poverty is well documented. Adolescent girls who receive an education are more likely to break out of their family poverty cycle. Older women not able to gain an education in their youth are more likely to suffer the effects of poverty later in life as their lifespan increases and income decreases. Notably, education is crucial because it provides the foundation for literacy, which in turn leads to life skills, critical thinking, communication and empowerment.

The SDG's are a people-powered agenda to "leave no one behind" yet women and girls are being left behind. Of the 758 million illiterate adults worldwide, two thirds of this population is women, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Girls are highly vulnerable during adolescence, which makes secondary education a critical time in preventing poverty from becoming a permanent condition. GWI programs address poverty through education by empowerment of women and girls in areas such as community engagement, teacher training and women teachers.

Cause:

Since 1990 the extreme poverty rates found around the world have been cut in half, however, one in five people in developing regions still live on less than \$1.25 a day. Attentiveness to principles such as the respect for human rights, meeting basic human needs, equal distribution of wealth and specifically access to quality education are essential. In order to continue the successful elimination of poverty and preventing people from regressing into poverty, emphasis must be placed on relevant education to help people transform their lives. However, clear success will only be ensured when there is a willingness and commitment on the part of the non-poor to assist in the elimination of the human degradation which poverty creates.

Poverty creates educational disadvantages within societies, leaving poor children with health issues and less developed language skills. The limitations created by poverty prevent impoverished students from obtaining the same benefits from school, typically due to social, emotional, and physical restrictions. The disadvantages faced by poorer children increase the cyclical factor of poverty. Extreme poverty affects varying groups within a population.

However, studies show that in situations of extreme poverty girls are at the most risk. Often girls inherit poverty from their mothers. Girls are to fall victim to abuse of all forms both in the household and at school. Abuse at school, such as sexual harassment limits a girl's chance of receiving an education and thus perpetuates a life in poverty.

The effects of a limited education is also seen in retired women who have become a growingly disadvantaged group due to pay gap differences, a halt in careers for child rearing and other domestic responsibilities. These gender differences combined with longer lifecycles creates diminished superannuation and pensions.

Markedly, the lack of current information and communication technology (ICTs) is negatively impacting girls and women trying to escape poverty. Girls and women are often limited to their access of technology including access to the internet which is a vital tool in today's world to gaining education and knowledge. Prioritising education is essential to preventing individuals from reverting to poverty.

GWJ Position and Recommendations:

GWJ calls for the elimination of poverty of girls and women through education and empowerment. In order to empower women economically, the opportunity for education must reach every woman including those most affected by poverty. Education for women must embrace the "leave no one behind" approach of the 2030 Agenda, including women who are from indigenous communities, those who have dropped out or not completed school, refugees, the disabled, the elderly and all other marginalised women who are currently left behind. With its 97 years of promoting quality education for girls, GWJ is in a position to speak on the interrelatedness of gender and poverty and education.

- Girls who drop out of school are at a higher risk for early marriage, early pregnancy, HIV infection and less earning power. All of these factors prevent girls from having a meaningful impact on society. Therefore, States must enforce mandatory education through secondary education.
- GWJ stresses that the education of girls will reduce the number of child marriages and in turn increase opportunities for careers and earning potential which affect poverty levels. In developing countries, one in three girls is married by the age of 18, and one in nine girls are married by the age of 15. To combat child marriage States must incriminate all child marriages under the age of 18. Next step is to make all involuntary marriages illegal.
- Financial literacy is a large barrier for women that can limit their ability to access institutional lending and savings. This lack of financial education limits a woman's knowledge of the financial sector which negatively impacts them

economically and socially. The gender gap in financial education is persistent across all regions of the world. Accessible financial education provides the necessary tools for women to gain an understanding of financial services. States are obliged to take a gender equality approach in all aspects of poverty eradication. This includes the financial aspect by implementing mandatory finance and economic courses in schools.

- Education can result in increased leadership development which increases a woman's chance to escape poverty. Many young girls lack a role model or a leader to guide them and demonstrate the benefits of education. GWI's Teachers for Rural Futures Project is an example of using leadership development to help both the candidate and their students. This project is especially helpful to the young girls in the villages who need a role model, like a female teacher, to encourage their full potential. Female teachers are role models because they are salaried women in a position of responsibility and influence and act as an example of the benefits of education for girls. GWI also calls on States to examine and strengthen their policy and legal frameworks and to be held accountable for educating girls. GWI asks States to implement a minimum number of female educators within their school systems. In addition, GWI asks States to sponsor mentor programs for young girls and women within their community.
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