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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 Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, 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

Breaking Silos: Key to Addressing Poverty and Achieving Sustainable Development

Introduction. A holistic and intersectional approach, which considers gender equality, human rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and social inclusion, is key to eradicating poverty. Breaking down of development silos is crucial to achieving sustainable development for all.

The Copenhagen Declaration supports this: “Social development and social justice cannot be attained in the absence of peace and security or in the absence of respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.” It also commits governments to “promote and protect the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also stresses, “The interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new Agenda is realised.”

The Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), a regional organization working with 80 partners in 21 countries across Asia-Pacific and globally, affirms that all human rights are intrinsically linked. The right to health, to sexual and reproductive rights, and to women’s self-determination, autonomy, and bodily rights, are inseparable from human rights to decent work, livelihood, housing, education, food, nutrition, land, water, property, freedom of expression, information, social security, and development. Control over our own bodies, sexualities, and fertility, are critical prerequisites for women’s empowerment and rights, and for enabling full participation in all domains of society — economic, social, political, and cultural.

Challenges. The Asia-Pacific region, which hosts 60.35% of the world’s 7.4 billion population (Population Reference Bureau 2016), faces huge challenges. Despite drastic improvements, 772 million people still live on less than USD1.25 a day in the region (18% of the region’s population), while 933 million more (40% of the region’s population) live on USD2 a day (ESCAP 2014). It should be noted that USD1.25 is an inadequate measure, and more a starvation line. Poverty reduction slowed down after the economic crises, and will be further affected as the region faces an economic slowdown. Additionally, the region’s past economic growth has not benefited everyone equally, and income inequality has increased (ESCAP 2016).

Two thirds of the region’s poor are women (UN-Women). ESCAP’s 2015 survey highlights patriarchy and unequal gender relations as a “fundamental obstacle to inclusive growth”. The report points that women remain largely excluded in the economic and political realms, and notes that inclusive growth is not possible unless these are rectified, and unless reproductive work is recognized, respected, and redistributed.

A multi-dimensional view of poverty also necessitates looking at other dimensions to see the multiple deprivations faced by the poor, such as on health, education, living standards, and ownership of assets (Varma). For example, 80% of the region’s population still does not have access to affordable health care (ESCAP

2016). Studies show a correlation between poverty and lack of access to health care, with poverty both a cause and consequence of poor health, especially for women. A 21-country ARROW research shows that “socio-economic inequalities play a determining role in access to contraception, maternal health services, and other SRH services” (Thanenthiran, Racherla, & Jahanath). Another research study in 21 Asia-Pacific countries reveals that high out-of-pocket health expenditure deters access to reproductive health care, with the poorest women being the most affected (Ravindran). This is alarming, considering that targets related to MDGs related to maternal health and reproductive health were largely unmet. Indeed, the largest number of maternal deaths outside of sub-Saharan Africa is in South Asia, unsafe abortion continues to be a major factor in maternal deaths in the region, women continue to carry the burden of contraception and many are still having more children than they want (Thanenthiran, Racherla, & Jahanath).

Eradicating poverty requires addressing social exclusion and inequalities of opportunity — whether based on gender, age, ethnicity, caste, socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation and gender expression, health status, marital status, occupation, or citizenship status — as these lead to powerlessness, poor social status, and lack of agency thus leading to poverty. For example, a large number of girls are stopped from going to school at puberty, whether due to child marriage, pregnancy, or increased household responsibilities. Early, child, and forced marriage is a consequence of poverty, and starts a vicious cycle of persistent poverty. It exposes girls to early sexual debut, pregnancies despite being emotionally and physically ill-prepared, gender-based violence, STIs, HIV and AIDS, and results in poor access to health, food, and nutrition due to their limited negotiating power. On the other hand, older women face increased vulnerabilities including “discrimination, social exclusion, and denial or right to property” (UNFPA).

People from lower income groups are more vulnerable to abuses of sexual rights, and such abuses can further entrench poverty. Stigma and discrimination further make it difficult for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender persons and intersex persons, HIV-positive people, and sex workers to get decent work and clean and safe housing, and have led to hate crimes and violence (Varma).

Meanwhile, disability can cause poverty, even as it can be caused by malnutrition, poor health care, and poor living conditions. Many of these causes are preventable; WHO estimates that annually, about 20 million women suffer from pregnancy and childbirth-related morbidities. Women with disabilities suffer a double burden because of their gender and their disability; poor women with disability a triple burden. They are thrice as likely to experience physical and sexual abuse than women without disabilities. They are often considered either as asexual or hypersexual, and have lesser access to sexual and reproductive health information and services (DFID).

Issues should not be addressed in isolation. Economic and political crises, conflicts, food insecurity and malnutrition, natural and climate change-induced disasters, harmful traditional cultural practices, and rising religious extremism and fundamentalism — all experienced in the Asia-Pacific — deepen poverty and exacerbate its impacts. Trade agreements reduce developing countries’ policy space to advance environmental and social concerns and to regulate corporations, and will

have negative effects to people's health, well-being, livelihood, and lives, especially of women, young people, and marginalized groups (APWLD, Kanagasingam).

Ways Forward. We call on UN Member States, international agencies, and UN institutions to:

- Use human rights-based, gender responsive and intersectional approaches to poverty eradication and sustainable development. Integral to this is guaranteeing that economic policies and poverty eradication efforts take into account gender equality, sexuality, SRHR, and social inclusion.
- Repeal laws and policies that erect barrier to information and services, or that criminalize or marginalize specific groups based on their gender, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, caste, health status, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious beliefs, occupation, and citizenship status. Adopt and implement measures to counter discriminatory practices and ensure access to justice.
- Prioritize public investments in social services, including health, SRHR, and education; and guarantee universal access to these.
- Adopt concrete measures to mitigate the impacts of economic, food, and fuel crises, climate change, disasters, conflict, migration, religious extremisms, and trade agreements to women, young people, and marginalized groups.
- Put in place strong accountability mechanisms, including for the corporate sector, to ensure they uphold human rights.
- Ensure meaningful participation of civil society and social movements, especially those working towards the rights of women, young people, and marginalized groups from the Global South, as equal partners in development at all levels.

Let us stop working in silos. ARROW, with our partners and allies, commit to work with Member States and international agencies towards achieving an equal, just, and sustainable world.

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