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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 Organisation mondiale des associations pour l'éducation prénatale and Make Mothers Matter, 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

L'Organisation Mondiale des Associations pour l'Éducation Prénatale (OMAEP) and Make Mothers Matter (MMM) wish to raise awareness of the necessity for all countries to take a trans-generational perspective on poverty.

UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank have highlighted the central role of education and early childhood development across all UN Sustainable Development Goals. No child should be left behind. As such, it is a critical factor for enabling societies to alleviate poverty by improving productivity through the formation of human capital. The logic is simple: alleviating poverty in societies is linked to economic prosperity, which requires a productive population, which in turn is dependent on quality education.

Unfortunately this cause and effect chain works in both directions. While education is key to the eradication of poverty — hunger, malnutrition and ill health, often tied to poverty, obstruct education — and this in turn limits human productivity growth and perpetuates poverty.

A solution to this conundrum requires a trans-generational perspective on poverty. A trans-generational perspective looks at the cause and effect chain across generations. It examines how interventions in one generation can avoid harm being perpetuated in future generations. And nowhere is the evidence more conclusive than interventions providing support and education for mothers during pregnancy and throughout their children's early years.

If the importance of a healthy lifestyle, good nutrition and health during pregnancy and early childhood is well recognized, the potential impact of a mother's mental and emotional health on her children's future outcome is not yet fully acknowledged and integrated enough into policymaking.

Neurosciences have recently confirmed that a baby's brain development is shaped by their earliest experiences, including during pregnancy. In particular, a baby's exposure to stress from any cause within the family, such as parental mental illness, neglect, mistreatment, domestic violence or simply poverty-related stress, can significantly affect their brain development. On the other hand, loving relationships and care, nurture and early stimulation support a healthy brain development and increase the chances that the child will achieve their full potential later in life.

In other words, early parenting and early child care and education can have a lifelong impact on a child's mental and emotional health and affect their physical, social and intellectual development — starting with their readiness for pre-school. Evidence in developed countries shows that a child who is not ready for pre-school education is less likely to succeed later in primary and secondary education.

Further, in addition to benefiting children (and their parents), the benefits of early education extend to society as a whole. Such so-called "positive externalities", include reductions in crime, and lower expenditures on health care and on remedial education.

A number of economic studies have shown that investing in early parenting and early childhood care and education is 5-6 times more effective than intervening

to solve problems later in life. A recent prospective analysis of comprehensive preconception care found that for every \$1 spent on preconception, \$1.60 is saved in maternal and foetal care costs. Other studies have shown that preconception care can save as much as \$5.19 for every \$1 invested (In Healthy Pregnancy and Healthy Children: Opportunities and Challenges for Employers — The Business Case for Promoting Healthy Pregnancy — AOL's WellBaby Program, USA.).

More recently in October 2016, The Lancet launched a new Early Childhood Development Series that highlights the high cost of inaction — an estimated 250 million children aged under five are now at risk of suboptimal development — and the need to support families to provide nurturing care from the very start of a child's life.

Early parenting is key since parents, both mother and father, or caregivers, provide the immediate physical, emotional and cognitive environment that will be the foundation for a child's development.

The conclusion of a recent study states: "it is imperative that we place the child's best interests as our highest priority, and we need to be mindful of the science that underlies child development — that children require consistent, sensitive caregiving from the start ..."

"The effects of early life adversity on brain and behavioral development" — Charles Nelson, Ph.D. (Boston Children's Hospital/Harvard Medical School, Harvard Center on the Developing Child).

Moreover, women's empowerment matters: the 2007 UNICEF "State of the World's Children" Report notes that "gender equality produces a double dividend: It benefits both women and children. Healthy, educated and empowered women have healthy, educated and confident daughters and sons".

Therefore, OMAEP and MMM calls on all governments to:

1. Recognize the importance of these critical early years for child development, especially between conception and age 3, and make it an investment priority for governments
2. Develop national policies educating and supporting mothers and fathers in their caring roles, especially during pregnancy and these early years, to ensure that babies benefit from protective, loving, nurturing and stimulating environments and relationships.

To this effect, OMAEP and MMM have developed a "Mother and Child Manifesto" that comprises 7 Childhood and Early Parenting Principles (CEPPs), a roadmap for governments to raise awareness, educate, promote and integrate early parenting and nurturing care into policies and evidence-based interventions across all relevant sectors.

Investment in Early Parenting and Childhood Care and Education is the best investment a country can do. Not only it is a matter of child rights, but it will be key to the realization of the 2030 Development Agenda, Starting with Goal 1: Eradicating Poverty.