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Statement submitted by Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), 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

Investing in an integrated approach to the eradication of poverty — protecting the family in times of wars and conflicts

Introduction

Considerable evidence has shown that extreme poverty remains unacceptably high and in dire need of intensified efforts to address it. As such, the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2016, highlight that ending poverty in all its forms is pivotal to the achievement of sustainable development for all.

Although, there has been tremendous effort towards eradicating poverty and enhanced peacebuilding, recent wars and conflicts in many regions have caused serious, far-reaching, and multi-faceted consequences on families and their members, in particular children, elderly, and women. Families and their members were forced into dealing with unexpected circumstances such as fleeing of their homes, living in the midst of war zones, losing loved ones and bearing intolerable circumstances. Evidence confirms that violent conflicts render families very vulnerable, changes their relations and alters their structure and composition. Destruction of essential public services such as health, electricity, water and sanitation deprives family members from basic services. Collapse of the rule of law during wars deprives families from security and protection especially for its most vulnerable members. The longer wars last, the deeper the crippling effects it has on increasing people's vulnerability.

Evidence shows that the cumulative impact of wars and violent conflict aggravates economies and weakens the ability of the State, local authorities or private sector in providing services and opportunities of livelihood for families and their members. Wars and conflicts shift public resources away from social protection, productive activities and basic services provided by the state to the families, consequently increasing family vulnerability to poverty. Furthermore, the effects of armed conflicts can cause "double vulnerability" for families when farms, scarce water sources and other natural resources are targeted. Conflict does not come to a halt when the fighting stops, instead, it continues to impact families' lives in the post conflict era. Within this context, those who were chronically poor during the war are likely to remain so during the peace era.

Considerable evidence has shown that the number of children who have been directly affected by armed conflict is enormous and unprecedented. During these conflicts, children have been maimed, killed or uprooted from their homes and communities. Children have been made orphans and have been subjected to exploitation and sexual abuse. Children have been abducted and recruited as soldiers. War frequently deprives children of access to humanitarian assistance and protection and thus the realization of their rights to health and education. Children not only have rights to health, nutrition and education, they have rights to protection, freedom from violence and exploitation, and to "a safe and supportive environment" (World Summit for Children, 1990). Poverty permeates every facet of a child's life from economic and material disadvantages, through social and relational constraints and exclusions, to the personal and more hidden aspects of poverty associated with shame, sadness and the fear of difference and stigma. Evidence has also shown that poverty in childhood in times of wars and conflicts is the root cause of poverty in adulthood.

The impact of armed conflict on children, especially infants and young children cannot be considered in isolation from women. Within this context, women, in particular, are severely impacted by wars and conflicts. Evidence shows that wars and conflicts alter women's lives dramatically and increase their economic burden, as

their spouses are killed, injured, migrated or joined the armed/fighting groups. In the absence of rule of law and collapse of the institutions of the state, women's economic burden increases. As men leave to fight, women are responsible for maintaining the social fabric of their families and communities. During and after wars, women are instrumental in providing a sense of family that supports children's healing from war-related trauma.

Evidence shows that women experience serious consequences, including displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty and family separation and disintegration, victimization through acts of murder, terrorism, torture, involuntary disappearance, sexual slavery, rape, and sexual abuse. Gender-based violence has also been exacerbated by wars and conflicts. Compounding these gender-specific effects are the lifelong social, economic and psychologically traumatic consequences of armed conflict and foreign occupation and domination (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995). Women, therefore, must be safeguarded from gender-specific violence and, when it occurs, supported in their own psychosocial healing. Their peacebuilding efforts must be promoted at all levels: local, regional, national and international. In turn, children will be beneficiaries.

Family policies play an important role in reducing poverty. Such policies have the untapped potential to contribute to the achievement of development goals at the national, regional, and global level.

Conclusion

It is evident that poverty and conflict interact in a negative, mutually reinforcing cycle. The increased frequency and intensity of fragility, conflicts and violence is a serious challenge to achieving Sustainable Development Goals, to ending extreme poverty and addressing the needs of the poor and vulnerable. The SDGs risk failing the most vulnerable in wars and conflict zones and the achievement of the first target of the 16th goal – “reducing all forms of violence and related deaths everywhere” - is threatened by the increased frequency of conflicts.

Despite the enormous efforts to scale up involvement in peacebuilding and protecting families and their members, there is still a need for an integrated approach to prevent the recurrence of violent conflicts.

A rights-based approach to poverty, based on the notion that poverty is a violation of human rights, is one reason to tackle poverty in times of wars and conflicts. The significance of child poverty is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which articulates children's rights to include an adequate standard of living, and freedom from deprivation across crucial aspects of their lives including health, education, nutrition, care, and protection.

A livelihood approach is another approach to alleviate poverty in conflicts zones. Livelihoods programs help affected families and vulnerable groups, such as people displaced by the conflict, young people, women, female-headed households and people with disabilities, avoid further destitution, marginalization and dependence on aid by providing emergency income to people who have lost jobs or businesses, repairing basic community infrastructure and service delivery and developing local capacity for early recovery.

Finally, a resilience-based approach builds on the existing abilities and skills of affected families and, focuses on strengthening the capacity of families to cope with the impacts of wars and conflicts through immediate emergency interventions, by bolstering livelihoods, housing, infrastructure and basic services; recovering from the socio-economic impact of these conflicts by regaining productive assets; and

sustaining this recovery toward development through a functioning and peaceful socio-economic environment.

Recommendations

(a) Ensuring broader and more consistent application of the approaches that have proven to be successful to support families and their members by providing alternative care, protection, access to education, health, sanitation, housing and socio-economic infrastructure in fragile situations;

(b) Focusing poverty alleviation strategies on the family as a unit and acknowledge that family breakdown can be both a root cause and an effect of poverty and its prevention is a priority during and following wars and conflicts;

(c) Adopting an integrated approach to understand the impact of conflict on family, children and women's poverty by using a rights framework; effective livelihood, resilience-based and gender sensitive programming in pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict situations;

(d) Protecting refugee families and their members against violence and exploitation, guaranteeing the right of all refugee children to education and expanding efforts to incorporate human rights and peace and environmental awareness into that education;

(e) Scaling up, multi-sector support for families and their members to convert the policy shifts made by refugee - hosting countries into support for families through social protection systems;

(f) Eliminating all factors preventing children from going to school including by making schools safe and improving teaching and learning; ensuring pathways back into school for those who have dropped out; recognition of school certificates; and provision of support for children who have experienced war related trauma;

(g) Improving information gathering, data collection, research and analysis on families, children and women in conflict situations in order to improve programs implementation and policy.
