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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: Affordable housing and social protection
systems for all to address homelessness**

Statement submitted by World Union of Small and Medium Enterprises, 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

How can the private sector, particularly SMEs and crafts contribute to provide affordable housing and social conditions for homeless people?

Introduction

The last time a global survey was attempted – by the United Nations in 2005 – an estimated 100 million people were homeless worldwide. As many as 1.6 billion people lacked adequate housing (Habitat, 2015). Homelessness is the most extreme result of social exclusion in many countries and the most visible. Despite this visibility, homelessness is one of the least known phenomena and has still not been addressed with comprehensive policies, and the paramount role of entrepreneurs, SMEs and their supporting institutions have not yet been adequately analysed by many governments and international institutions.

Understanding of the global problem

To help the supporters better understand this global problem, delegates to the 58th Session of the Commission for Social Development should give high priority to the subject theme, with a special focus on the contributions of the private sector, particularly of SMES and crafts to sustainable solutions.

Main reasons for homelessness

The World Union of Small and Medium Enterprises (WUSME) shares the opinion of leading experts that a number of factors can push people into homelessness, including shortages of affordable housing, privatization of civic services, investment speculation in housing, unplanned and rapid urbanization, as well as poverty, unemployment and family breakdown. Also contributing is a lack of services and facilities for those suffering from mental illness, alcoholism or substance abuse and displacement caused by conflicts, natural disasters and government housing policies.

Recognizing the people living in slums

In our world, one in eight people live in slums, averaging one billion people living in slum conditions today. This not only amounts to a rather unacceptable contemporary reality but to one whose numbers are continuously swelling. Recognition of the slum challenges involves acknowledging the need of enforcing the rights and realizing the potential of slum dwellers must be a priority. Such as devising the affordable housing mechanisms that fulfill the right to adequate housing for all income levels and putting housing at the centre. Institutionalized frameworks should address issues concerning land, housing and infrastructure, finance, mobilization of local resources, construction standards and other related areas (e.g. labour, health and education). The private sector, SMEs and crafts need to be involved in all forthcoming housing mechanisms.

The approach of Finland: A positive example

In the last years Finland got rid of the night shelters and short-term hostels. They had a very long history in Finland, and everyone could see they were not getting people out of homelessness. With state, municipal and NGO backing, flats were bought, new blocks built, and old shelters converted into permanent, comfortable homes – among them the Rukkila homeless hostel in the Helsinki suburb of

Malminkartano where former homeless people live. As a matter of fact, SMEs and crafts play a crucial role in that programme.

We encourage governments and NGOs worldwide to follow the homeless policy of Finland.

Small house-builders and SMEs and crafts: Most important for alleviating homelessness

A generally more attractive environment for house building investment, improved economic conditions and political action to tackle blockages and support first time buyers would contributed to unprecedented increases in housing supply. Improve access to finance: Government backed guarantee on loans to small house-builders are a basic requirement. Action against late payments should be undertaken since large companies use to pay with delay. Increased apprenticeship opportunities from large to small businesses are urgently needed. Barriers to building on small sites will have to be removed and help should be available to streamline the planning process for SMEs and crafts.

We highlight the opportunity for SME support organizations to participate in initiatives such as the World Habitat Awards.

Housing projects and approaches are sought that demonstrate practical, innovative and sustainable solutions to current housing issues faced by countries all around the world. Energy or water saving, income generation, social inclusion, community and individual empowerment, health benefits, capacity building or education would be additional benefits of an innovative housing policy.

Special recommendation

A meaningful combination of economic and social policies would help many homeless people find decent housing and provide positive benefits for old and lonely citizens.

In many countries, families with children have in their younger years bought family homes or spacious apartments that are not fully used after the children have moved out of the family house or flat. Homeless people, but also homeless refugees could be trained as nurses, farmers, skilled workers and then get the right to reside in the old people's premises. Residential communities could commission smaller enterprises including crafts to renovate and adapt these apartments accordingly.

HABITAT NGOs in as many countries as possible should be involved in the organization of such programs and receive state compensation for their work.

Closing sentence

Special focus shall be given on the contributions of the private sector, particularly of SMES and crafts to sustainable solutions for the alleviation of homelessness.

Submission of the written statement for the 58^o session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD58) by the World Union of Small & Medium Enterprises (WUSME), co-authored by Prof. Dr. Norbert W. Knoll von Dornhoff, General Secretary, under the guidance of Dr. Gian Franco Terenzi, WUSME President and with assistance of WUSME Office Bearers and Staff Members.