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protection systems for all to address homelessness

Statement submitted by International Federation for Home Economics, 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

Many women in the Global South require international economic policy intervention as a social protection measure to mitigate feminized homelessness from dispossession.

The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE), the only global organisation for Home Economics and related fields, maintains that homes are environments where individuals reach their full potential, live a life of dignity, and develop and express their global interdependence. The right to land upon which a home may be sustained is a fundamental human right and essential to human flourishing.

The most significant inequalities and pressing challenges to addressing homelessness and ensuring social protection for all manifest in one of the world's poorest and most vulnerable populations, women in Asia, Africa and Latin America, referred to hereafter as the Global South. Due to economic shifts toward multinational industrialization and state privatization of customary land the international community must respond collectively to achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. The major drivers, gaps, and priority areas presented in this statement are informed by research from diverse scholars whose work span three continents, dozens of countries, and several states. The social protection measures put forward by the International Federation for Home Economics are primarily targeted at economic policy reform and intervention.

The major drivers of women's homelessness through dispossession in the Global South are national economic shifts toward state industrialization of agricultural and aquaculture land and resources in partnership with transnational corporations and creditors. Economic agreements between governments and international investors denationalize and privatize land historically controlled by customary law in which women had shared use of property and natural resources for the respective purposes of building basic homes and subsistence livelihoods. Large-scale corporate land deals realized through state acquisitions, grants, licenses, and up to 95-year leases are justified on the premise of public good; however, in many cases such arrangements have resulted in devastating outcomes for women, in particular, homelessness through loss of assets and income. The social obligations and communal arrangements under customary tenure have been particularly important for women who are more dependent upon them in order to use the land and control assets such as livestock and crops to generate income. The various forms of land privatization and encroachments disproportionately hurt women because of pre-existing patriarchal family and state structures. Newly privately titled land is registered to family heads who are usually male. Customary inheritance provisions for widows or daughters are altered or eliminated resulting in loss of usufructuary economic assets and means of income generation. Women are excluded from decisions about mortgage terms, credit amounts, and trade agreements, yet they labour to meet financial obligations. In the event of the death of a father or husband, women cannot negotiate the means to remain in their homes or acquire desirable assets such as machinery, vehicles, or cold storage because credit is linked to collateral and income. Women's ineligibility for title rights and related sources of income combined with their exclusion from negotiations for resettlement further depletes their limited, customary economic status and feminizes homelessness in the Global South.

Priority areas for intervention can be established through the identification of existing gaps and the isolation of destructive politico legal, health, education, and family effects. One of the most exacerbating factors mitigating social development coincident to economic growth are long term, outstanding legal claims and delayed

court rulings over unfulfilled promises. Resettlement, rehabilitation, restitution, and resolution agreements between corporations, investors, creditors, governments, and local people have not uniformly been honoured. Increasingly difficult relations and orders of eviction initiate violence and military responses. Temporary settlements, legal and illegal slums are in poor condition without infrastructure, schools, or hospitals. To overcome the impacts of losing a father or husband, some women generate income through the sex trade, exposing themselves and others to HIV/AIDS; others acquire a home through child, early, or forced marriages. In some instances, women resort to scavenging or illegal trade for which they are harassed, violated or imprisoned. Education is another contributor to feminized homelessness because women do not always possess necessary literacy levels to negotiate, keep records, or, to take legal action. Unfulfilled promises in the industrialization of natural resources and the privatization of land has had a significant effect on families. Adequate housing provides a source of protection, security and connection for women and their children and feminized homelessness or excessively gendered tenure puts women in a position in which they cannot adequately care for or fight for their children.

The International Federation for Home Economics proposes two, specific, concrete, evidence-based policy recommendations to address feminized homelessness in the Global South. First, providing a voice to homeless women through qualitative inquiry. Second, introducing or expanding existing international economic policies to explicitly include resettlement, rehabilitation, restitution, and resolution requirements for investors participating in and enjoying the benefits of United Nations-affiliated credentials for sustainable asset management.

Due to the patriarchal nature of both family and state structures, women are often excluded from local, state, and international discussions and decisions about their homes and livelihoods. Concealing their voices softens oppositional consciousness and perpetuates the status quo. Women engage in rich forms of knowledge production about their experiences in the social and material world. They alleviate exclusion and seek solace by acting, thinking, writing, singing, dancing, storytelling, and engaging in ritual practices. The International Federation for Home Economics urges the United Nations Development Programme, under its focus to accelerate structural transformations for sustainable development, to specifically target qualitative inquiry into women's personal and collective knowledge in order to include their perspectives in public forums and to foster spaces for listening and change.

There is a critical role for policy action by investment and financial groups committed to social sustainability. Economic development presents opportunities for constitutional reform, education, employment, reduced domestic burdens, ancillary benefits, or, true social transformation when agreements are fair, democratic, an upheld. The United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative works with over two hundred financial institutions and a range of partner organisations in order to implement sustainability in all levels of financial institution operations. The United Nations Global Compact is a policy platform for 7,000 corporate signatories in 135 countries. Principles for Responsible Investment is supported by the United Nations through the two preceding organizations. All three groups are in a position to take corrective action. The International Federation for Home Economics urges the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative, the United Nations Global Compact, and the Principles for Responsible Investment to immediately initiate a review and process for revision of their minimum requirements of signatories, including governance, audits, quality assurance, validation and adjudication in credibility of reported data; and, in addition to signatory self-reporting the introduction of a complaint procedure through which specific, evidence-based reports of non-compliance can be investigated. We emphasize to the three aforementioned

organizations the importance of delisting any signatories whose portfolios, assets under management, or corporate practices promote, effect, or tolerate feminized homelessness through dispossession, in any of its forms, in the Global South.

The International Federation for Home Economics offers this statement in the context of and with the hope for the attainment of the following Sustainable Development Goals and several of their targets: Gender Equality, Reduced Inequality, Peace and Strong Institutions, and Partnerships to Achieve the Goal. We sincerely thank the Commission for Social Development for the opportunity to work toward the realization of our mutual aims of universal peace and larger freedom for our entire human family.
