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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 VIVAT International, 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

We welcome the commitment made by member states to implement social protection, fundamental for ending poverty in all its forms and a major contribution to the realization of Human Rights for all, especially the most vulnerable.

We are conscious of the need to take the next step and include homelessness in social protection systems in order to provide the security and safety of a home to those trapped in poverty and subject to misconceptions, stereotypes and discrimination. We are particularly preoccupied with system failure regarding those people living without a home everywhere, in rural areas as well as in cities. We urge member states to dedicate common effort to ending homelessness in all its diverse manifestations and wherever it occurs.

Homelessness has long been recognized as a global phenomenon, affecting poorer populations in both the developed and developing worlds (Springer 2000, UN Habitat, 2000; The New Urban Agenda, 2016). At a time of unprecedented migration and urbanization, protection of human dignity is a central challenge of our time.

Homelessness forms part of a process of marginalization which is more than just being without a permanent shelter or “house-less” and lacking sufficient resources to attain one. It also means the inability to attain the quality of life and opportunities that link settled people to a network of relationships and interconnected services. Among the many drivers of homelessness is the failure to reconcile individual needs and systemic factors such as lack of property, poor urban planning, inadequate and unaffordable housing, and absence of proper legislations and implementation.

Grassroots level perspectives by faith-based groups show that, becoming homeless is caused by a gamut of issues: poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, low paid jobs, evictions, land grabs, internal and international migration, rural urban migration, natural and environmental disasters, war and conflicts. Women and girls, as well as older persons and persons with disabilities are adversely impacted, which has serious repercussions on their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Domestic violence, desertion, divorce, broken families, and the denial of property right to women in several countries often results in impoverishment and increased female homelessness. Their survival depends on what they earn or sometimes on the goodwill of people. They are not protected by labour standards, rights or social security. Trafficking among the homeless women is a critical issue.

Rural urban migration is closely linked to models of development which have favored investment in urban centers over that of rural areas and failed to address the infrastructure and resource needs that guarantee sustainable livelihoods for people living in the rural interior. In many countries of the global south, the neglect of small-scale agriculture, inadequate infrastructure, poor transportation systems, urban-biased policies and sparse provision of services (education, health care, etc.) coupled with the lack of employment opportunities have contributed to the pressure for people to migrate to the cities with the expectation of attaining a better life. Instead, many of them find themselves living on the streets or in crowded informal settlements, without secure tenure, lacking points of reference; having no shelter, no job and no place to store their belongings while they search for one. In the recent years, in many countries internally displaced people are rendered homeless for long years deprived of a dignified living that lasts for generations. They are vulnerable to street violence and criminalization.

Based on the local initiatives by our members we can say that faith-based organizations play a unique role as service providers to the Homeless. They reach out to them in critical times by providing temporary shelters and through psychological

and emotional support. Through their ministries/ initiatives the homeless persons and families could avail of much needed basic needs, temporary shelters, open shelters, childcare centers, health care and educational facilities. Along with addressing temporal issues, they also provide emotional, vocational, psychological and community support. Working in collaboration with other likeminded organizations and groups, as well as with local government machinery, for ensuring betterment and sense of security as they face their vulnerable situations. Through provision of Vocational training and socio-cultural activities for their children, Migrant Integration Center in Brazil has enabled many women to earn a living. The initiatives by Holy Cross Ministries in USA has assisted hundreds of women to secure a better life. Their experiences highlight the added vulnerabilities experienced by immigrant women who are also victims of domestic violence or sexual assault, which makes them doubly affected with heightened fears.

In the case of Brazil, some initiatives promoted by the “Pastoral da Rua” of the Catholic Bishops Conference have supported social movements of solidarity that have led to the formation of various cooperative enterprises and helped to move people off the streets and attain dignified conditions of life. Sometimes, as in the case of Asmare, Belo Horizonte, Brazil this has been achieved through securing contracts with the city in the area of waste management and recycling. Over the last 30 years the Cooperative initiative has enabled many hundreds of waste pickers and formerly homeless people living on the streets of Belo Horizonte to move off the streets into temporary and then permanent accommodation and steadily improve their living conditions and that of their children, thereby re-establishing their lives.

Poverty Eradication, a people centered sustainable Development Goal (SDG1), demands a political will by member states, and commitment by government and civil society alike. Universal social protection is vital for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SDG 1.3 upholds the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable. A comprehensive social protection to endless homeless will require a comprehensive understanding of homelessness and planning for social spending for eradicating poverty and inequality.

This means including firm commitments to the realization of human rights in cities, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It will require a comprehensive common understanding of homelessness in its diverse forms, its drivers, and concrete action. The process also will require the full participation of stakeholders including civil society and marginalized groups, women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities, the establishment of transparent mechanisms for monitoring, as well as the assurance of ensuring access to justice for all human rights.

Hence, we must insist on assuring the political will to determine that it is the first and foremost role governments at all levels everywhere to seek real and viable solutions in serious consultation with those who have thus far given so much to these, even without the resources that only governments can make possible. Amongst these we include those living in extreme poverty, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) and social service personnel who have knowledge of the reality and the willingness to collaborate in finding and promulgating solutions.

Our recommendations are:

- Develop a comprehensive global framework for conceptualizing and measuring homelessness to ensure common language and a point of reference at local, national and international levels for setting standards to address their complex issues including housing.

- Develop Housing policies based on the principles of social inclusion, environmental protection and economic effectiveness, as called for by the New Urban Agenda and legal provisions made for affordable housing.
- Address push factors in rural migration by prioritizing rural economy and developing rural areas for quality of life through integrated development policies.
- Consider cross cutting issues affecting homelessness including gender, persons with disabilities, older persons, internally displaced peoples.
- Increase social spending and provide adequate housing and social protection to all, to eliminate vulnerability of people living in poverty including women and girls in rural and urban areas.

The statement has been jointly written by:

Religious of the Sacred Heart
