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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: inclusive and resilient recovery from
COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being, and
dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its
forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda**

Statement submitted by Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Loreto Generalate, 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

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary-Loreto Generalate, a faith-based non-governmental organization, and the other organizations endorsing this statement work with and among the most vulnerable and marginalised populations of society. The members of these organisations have played a vital role during the Covid-19 pandemic, reaching out to those living in poverty to provide medical relief, food, and other necessary assistance.

The pandemic has exposed harsh and profound inequalities in our societies and further exacerbated existing disparities within and among countries. Women and children bear the brunt of this crisis. Many women face increased economic insecurity, while violence against women and girls is on the rise. We must act now to reduce the worst impacts of the pandemic on the most vulnerable.

The Sustainable Development Goals are essential guides to eliminating global poverty and hunger. The pandemic has aggravated conditions of poverty around the world, and, according to the United Nations 2021 Sustainable Development Goals Report, poverty rates increased for the first time in a generation. Moreover, between 119 and 124 million people are re-experiencing extreme poverty. With four billion people excluded from social protection measures financial support is not widely available. Due to the long-term adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, Southern Asia is set to add 32 million and sub-Saharan Africa 26 million people to the current number of individuals living below the poverty line. This is all the more relevant in rural areas where, according to the United Nations 2020 Sustainable Development Goals Report, the poverty rate is about three times the rate of urban areas.

The pandemic has also increased conditions of global hunger, with an additional 70 to 161 million people experiencing hunger. The number of undernourished people has increased since 2014, from 607 million to up to 811 million people globally. The 2020 Report further indicates that 2.37 billion people are without food or unable to eat a healthy, balanced diet on a regular basis. It is estimated that around 144 million children under the age of 5 were affected by stunting in 2019, three quarters of whom are living in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

According to a 2021 report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime entitled *The Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons and Responses to the Challenges*, the pandemic has created larger pools of vulnerable persons who, due to their worsened economic situation, were recruited for labour or sexual exploitation. Women, children, and migrants are especially vulnerable to recruitment and exploitation. Children's schooling has been interrupted by the pandemic, and, because of precarious family financial situations, children are increasingly targeted by traffickers.

Our networks are actively responding to the needs of those affected by poverty and hunger due to the pandemic. In Kenya, significant efforts were undertaken to alleviate the effects of the pandemic on the 14,181 children in our community-based program, *Lea Toto*. These children reside in resource-poor communities surrounding the city of Nairobi, most residing in one-bedroom huts and living on or below the poverty line. Efforts were made to continue providing the 3493 children living with HIV with their anti-retroviral medicine and to keep all the children healthy during the lockdown. Families locked down in their homes had no means of financial support. To mitigate this, from May 2020, our network began to provide food support to an increasing number of households. By December, they had served 1,874 families with 10,241 members.

Our network in India also responded to the Covid-19 crisis. Due to the lockdown, all the industries and factories were shut down and the markets were closed. Heads of families had nowhere to go to earn their livelihood. Our community was advised to “ensure that no one dies of hunger in your area.” Accordingly, efforts were undertaken to reach out to the neediest. Our networks distributed dry rations on an emergency basis among the most vulnerable, including the Mahadalits, Musahars, transgender people, nomads, gypsies, widows, those without ration cards, and the differently abled.

Once emergency needs were met, there was the realization that people had started to go back to work through various agents, making it easy for them to become victims of human trafficking. Consequently, through existing Self-Help Groups, Self Help Group Federations as well as the Women’s Bank, the community commenced livelihood programs among the most vulnerable. Concerted effort was made to maximize the use of savings among the needy. All 1,500 women associated with our Mary Ward Development Center Gulni were asked to assist anyone found in need of support, mainly through the provision of food.

More than 250 women have benefited from income generating activities. These activities include goat rearing, animal husbandry, poultry farming, constructing tent houses and tent items, marginal farming activities, small business, grocery shops, taxis, carpentry, petty shops, ready-made shops, tailoring, and mobile shops. Many women have emerged as major contributors to their family livelihood during this pandemic period.

Our organizations strongly believe that the eradication of poverty is only possible if we pay attention to the processes of transformation and the resilience of excluded communities in our society. Although there is a growing awareness of these global problems and their solutions, political will and action are lacking. Considering the urgency of the situation, better policies to reduce poverty, supported by budgetary allocations are critical. Governments must take steps to monitor progress in reducing poverty to mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic. Special attention needs to be given to the situation of women and children.

Knowing that the elimination of poverty and hunger is dependent upon a just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the following principles of just recovery must be implemented:

- People’s health and well-being must be prioritized. Health is a human right and a feature of integral well-being.
- We need rights-based universal social protection for all, including floors that are nationally owned and funded, especially for people in precarious situations and extreme vulnerability due to structural oppression.
- The needs of workers and communities must be prioritized, including safe and fair labour standards, the right to unionize, and respect for Indigenous sovereignty in regard to resources.
- In order to prevent future crises, we need to build resilient societies now.
- Solidarity and equity will enable recovery, knowing that no part of the world truly recovers from the pandemic if all do not recover.
- Finally, Indigenous Rights must be respected, including the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, in line with the standard of free, prior, and informed consent.

We therefore call upon the Member States to:

- Ensure that people everywhere have access to essential services and social protection.
- Increase investments in governance, social protection, the green economy, and digitalization that, according to the United Nations Development Programme, could lift 74 million women and girls out of extreme poverty by 2030.
- Reform policies for social spending on public services such as education, health and social protection that have a proven positive impact on reducing poverty, particularly for the women and girls who are the most dependent on them.

If we are going to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals on poverty and hunger, all people must have a voice. Member States must incorporate a wide variety of perspectives into their policy and program decision-making so that no one is left behind.

This statement is also endorsed by:

Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

International Presentation Association

Loretto Community (Sisters of Loretto)

Sisters of Charity Federation

Soroptimist International

UNANIMA International

VIVAT International
