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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 the FEMM Foundation, 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 Fertility Education & Medical Management (FEMM) Foundation offers a knowledge-based health program for women inspired by women's right to be informed participants in their own healthcare and to make voluntary decisions based on options, information, and understanding. The Foundation is dedicated to health education, medical research, and improving reproductive health care to advance women's health. FEMM's work includes health education for women, medical training for doctors, and reproductive health research.

International law recognizes a right to the "highest attainable standard of health," and this is essential to allowing for inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflect this in their commitment to health in Goal 3. Good health empowers achievement in education and work. In contrast, poor health can lead to missing school, lost days at work, and lower income. By ensuring quality healthcare for all, we enable everyone's participation in the social and economic life of their communities. This participation bridges gaps in equality, animates social inclusion, and makes good fiscal and wage policies more likely to reach as many as possible. For women and girls, who often face inequality and exclusion, reproductive health (SDG target 3.7) is a key part of this equation.

Women and girls comprise approximately half the population of the world but are more vulnerable than men when they lack poor social protection and security. Women and girls migrating and those who are homeless often have little or no access to doctors or clinics, and struggle to get the care they need. Health can help or hinder women and girls' education and participation in the social and economic life of their communities and in the world. By implementing good healthcare for homeless women and girls who struggle to acquire regular, safe, and adequate housing, it is possible to edge closer to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2 and 3.

According to a study by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the COVID-19 pandemic will disproportionately affect young women over men worldwide with larger numbers of unemployment, and school and job-training absenteeism. Education serves as a vital resource in poverty alleviation as it leads to critical opportunities that allow for economic stability. One form of education that young people, in particular women and girls, still lack is one that addresses reproductive health.

Understanding one's own body is essential for good health and empowers women and girls to be informed participants in their health. Women often accept as normal symptoms such as irregular bleeding, pain, depression, mood swings, and weight gain, not realizing that these are frequently signs of underlying hormonal imbalances and abnormalities. Even when women do seek medical care, most health care providers and programs struggle to diagnose them and may only treat the symptoms.

These underlying conditions can affect women and girls' long-term overall health, sometimes irreversibly. They can also affect women and girls' ability to complete their education, engage in work, plan their families, and other aspects of their lives. Poor health fosters inequality by undermining women and girls' ability to realize their potential and their capacity to drive development in their communities. Women and girls who have untreated medical conditions can be empowered through both knowledge and good medical treatment.

A woman who understands how her body works can monitor her health and seek help when needed. Even women who have not completed schooling can learn to

monitor their signs of health. Understanding women's bodies will also combat stigma and myths associated with normal biological processes such as menstruation that can keep women and girls from accessing educational and career opportunities.

FEMM has developed an app to help women take control of their health. The FEMM App is available free of charge and is now available in English and Spanish on both iPhone and Android systems. Women who use the FEMM App can track their observations and symptoms to better understand their bodies and health. Just as each woman is different, so are her observations and experiences, which is why the app is completely customizable. Women can track as much or as little as they like and add symptoms and observations. It also provides insights into what a woman is experiencing in her cycle and can flag potential health concerns and connect women with medical professionals for treatment.

FEMM also enables women to make informed choices about family planning. There is a right to adequate family planning and information about reproductive and sexual health that is accurate and respects cultural, religious, and ethical beliefs. Programs focused on providing reproductive health commodities often fail to ensure that women have the education needed to understand their bodies and to comprehend the products they are being offered. These commodities may also not always respect women's values. The knowledge-based health education and medical care approach employed by FEMM is uniquely well-suited to meet these needs while respecting individual choices and values.

FEMM's researchers have looked at women's health with a new perspective. They have found that a woman's hormonal health is intrinsically linked with her overall health. In fact, research from the Infectious Diseases Society of America shows that women with healthy hormone levels and ovulation have improved outcomes when suffering from COVID-19. FEMM researchers have developed better diagnostic criteria to identify conditions that are currently treated mainly at the symptomatic level, and they instead treat them at the root. FEMM educates women about various family planning methods and their potential side effects, the science of their bodies, how to identify when they are fertile, and how to achieve or avoid pregnancy. It also demystifies how women and girls' bodies work, combating stigma and promoting understanding and respect. FEMM is taking a new look at the health of contemporary women in ways that will help them to take charge of their health and thrive in their communities.

Women and girls also need good healthcare to meet their needs when they do identify health concerns. FEMM's Medical Management program trains doctors to diagnose and treat reproductive health problems with a holistic view of a woman's body that incorporates recent research on the complex hormonal interactions between different body systems. This interaction, and the intricacy of the hormonal activity in a woman's body, is essential to the experience of health in the entire female body. FEMM has developed innovative protocols that allow doctors to identify underlying problems with precision and treat them effectively. This medical support provides treatments that help women to live healthy lives.

Women's full participation in society requires the investment in women's health and health education. Women's healthcare has often failed to meet their needs. However, informed decisions lead to healthier decisions, and allow women to continue to positively affect family and community health outcomes. Through FEMM's innovative programs, women will be empowered to take charge of their healthcare, and health systems will be able to meet their needs.

The pandemic prompted a myriad of innovative solutions during a time of uncertainty. This endeavour started with addressing fundamental needs such as alleviating poverty and hunger; yet the long-term solutions require an investment in

sustained growth and holistic well-being that empowers society. When women are able to attain the highest level of health they can attain, they are in a better position to resiliently recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. In seeking to fill gaps to build a more resilient society that can combat hunger and poverty, FEMM's programs are ready to be incorporated into the health components of social protection programs. FEMM is prepared to assist the Commission and Member States in achieving this goal.
