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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: “Fostering social development and social
justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the
implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development and to achieve the overarching goal of
poverty eradication”**

**Statement submitted by Grail, The, Institute of the Blessed Virgin
Mary-Loreto Generalate, and VIVAT International,
non-governmental organizations 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, The Grail and VIVAT International welcome the Commission on Social Development's focus on social justice as a critical principle for development and social policies to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Our global networks in over 100 countries collaborate with and supports women, girls, and their communities, offering programs in education, mentoring, economic, political, and social capacity building that allows them to self-advocate and claim their human rights. We know that poverty is a gendered issue with the most affected being women and girls.

We are committed to the promotion and realization of social justice for all and the full and equal enjoyment by all people, especially women and children, of their rights and fundamental freedoms (throughout their lifetime) while also caring for our planet. As Catholic faith-based organizations, all our work is underpinned by Catholic Social Principles, founded on an unwavering belief in the inherent dignity of the human person and the corresponding rights that enable all people to reach their full potential. These same principles are enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights and the values that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs describe as the principal basis for social justice - fairness, equality, respect for diversity, access to social protection, and the application of human rights in all spheres of life, including in the workplace. We believe that if all social and economic policies are founded on these principles, we will achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and provide opportunities for all to live with dignity.

Eradication of poverty is the primary goal of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and we know that we are not on track to achieve this. The 2023 Secretary General's Report states that at the current rate of progress about 575 million people, 340 million women and girls, will continue to live in extreme poverty by 2030. Although most countries provided support and cash transfers during the pandemic, the effects of the worsening climate crisis, global conflict and inflation have deteriorated the socio-economic situation of most people, especially minority and marginalized groups of people, in both the global north and south.

Our networks report that, aside from a lack of access to quality education, health care, food security, and labour protection - all of which contribute to reduced poverty - marginalized and minority groups also experience discrimination, unfair cultural standards and corruption that further reduces their ability to improve their socioeconomic status. In some states of South Asia, corruption in local governments reduces the funds and services that people can access. In some instances, it is not even distributed. Limited labour protection policies result in indigenous tea plantation workers being taken advantage of and paid less than the minimum wage. For women in some communities in Timor Leste, for example, the lack of access to finance and support to start a small business reduces their ability to earn an income for their family. Girls continue to lag behind in access to quality education and other resources.

As an education institution, we know from experience that quality education, both formal and informal, are critical to poverty alleviation and empower people to change their economic and social situation. In South Sudan, where we were invited to establish the first girls' secondary school in a rural community, several graduates have returned as teachers and nurses, allowing them to assist their families. This is slowly changing the perception in the community that the only value girls have is as brides. The economic situation of the families improved, and these young women not only changed the economic situation of their families but also the social situation of girls in the community.

The Collective Voices Program in India educates and raises awareness of women tea plantation workers who learn about the services available to them as well as laws on workers' rights. In the same community, a Children's Parliament was formed to educate and train children about their rights and enable them to know the available government services.

In Slovakia, our network offers education to Roma young women and girls, especially those who left school due to pregnancy. When their children are grown, without education these women are unable to find decent work. The programs provide them with an opportunity to return to school, gain training or qualifications that allow them to gain better paying job.

In all these communities, quality education has lifted women, girls and their communities from extreme poverty and vulnerability. We know that education is the key. However, health and other social protection programs are also important because homelessness, poor health and malnutrition affect the ability of both adults and children to learn and to create viable futures for themselves. Therefore, we reiterate the need for comprehensive and robust social policies to address poverty. And it is essential that all peoples, in all their diversity, have equal access to these social policies.

Research shows that in countries where quality education, universal health care and other social protections are provided to everyone, there are less people experiencing poverty and the whole community benefits, with less social issues and conflict. And yet, in most countries, a large proportion of their government spending goes to national defence, law enforcement and policing. If we are serious about achieving the eradication of poverty by 2030, we must redirect global expenditures to prioritize this goal.

According to an April 2023 media release from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, total global military expenditure reached a new high of \$2.24 trillion in 2022. The United States, China and Russia comprised the three largest spenders, with 56% of the global total. This is unacceptable. We, as a world community, spend more money on the potential destruction of human life than we do on measures to ensure the dignity and rights of all.

The Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs indicated that, "It is estimated that the cost to achieve quality universal primary and early secondary education for all (SDG4) would barely exceed 3 percent of global annual military spending, while eliminating extreme poverty and hunger (SDG1 and 2) would amount to only about 13 percent of annual military spending. Reinvesting 5 percent of global military spending would also exceed the initial annual costs of adapting to climate change in developing countries (SDG13)."

We call on Member States, governments, and global leaders to commit to:

- Substantial financial investment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, redirecting resources from military investment to economic and social development measures.
- Ensure that any economic development does not come at the expense of our earth.
- Implement the national constitutional and legislative laws that provide equal access to quality and affordable education, affordable healthcare, social protection and living wages for everyone without discrimination.
- Establish and invest in a fully financed universal social protection system for delivering on the promise of the SDGs. We call on Member States to come to a

consensus on a Global Fund for Social Protection. Social protection systems are recognized by the United Nations as a key enabler of the SDGs.

- Include people with lived experience and directly affected in the design, implementation, and assessment of social policies. It is critical that women and girls are given the opportunity for meaningful participation in all these processes.
- Reform existing global financial structures to address global economic inequities.

We call on Member States, governments, and their leaders to deliver and implement all the commitments they promised, including the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Paris Climate Accords, and, most importantly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
