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Statement submitted by Casa Generalizia della Societa' del Sacro Cuore, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of the Mission, Congregations of St. Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, Edmund Rice International Limited, Fondazione Proclade Internazionale – Onlus, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Loreto Generalate, International Presentation Association, Loretto Community (Sisters of Loretto), Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Passionists International, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Salesian Missions, Inc., School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Charity Federation, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, UNANIMA International, 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

We, members of the Justice Coalition of Religious, a global community of Catholic Sisters, Brothers, priests, and their partners in mission, welcome the Commission's attention to the role of institutions and financial mechanisms in the realities of poverty and gender inequality.

Our global financial system is built upon a profit-centered, patriarchal, and colonialist notion that the primary economy is the asset-clustering mechanism whose ultimate goal is the sequestration of Earth's resources in the fewest hands possible. This system dismisses the true economy demonstrated by natural ecosystems: a mutually sustaining exchange of goods and services among interdependent beings. It belittles true economy as fantastical idealism, a digression from genuine economic discourse that requires qualifying words like "care" and "social". Reports from our members across the globe affirm that humanity's efforts to sustain this false economy have left us in a state of serious social and environmental debt and that women and girls have been bearing a disproportionate share of it.

In service of the false economy, we have utterly devalued the labour of those who serve our social and environmental well-being, forcing them to compete for an inadequate patchwork of grants, loans, scholarships, and social-welfare funds, each one just a drop of justice masquerading as an outpouring of charity. We have mistaken an abundant planet for one of scarcity, greed for wisdom, and limitless consumption for success. We have done so at our collective peril.

In response, members of our global community have undertaken projects that aim to empower women and girls, not as labourers equipped to serve the rights-blind economy, but as agents of transformation equipped to lead an economy in service of rights.

Most of our congregations have been involved in education as a mechanism for the lifelong empowerment of women and girls. Dominican Missionary Sisters in Zambia, Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry in central India, and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, have been engaged in endeavours to divert young girls from early marriage and pregnancy through a combination of scholarships and personal mentorship. The Sisters identified early marriage as a path that tends to lead to girls' lifelong poverty and total financial dependence on male family members. They also noted that girls who have had the opportunity to obtain at least a secondary education frequently become the fiercest advocates and financial supporters for the education of their younger sisters and girls in their communities. The long-term mentorship of girls by such educated young women has been a critical ingredient of social change in contexts where tradition has normalized child marriage and policies on legal age for marriage have proven difficult to enforce.

Girls and women who have had the opportunity to complete secondary studies are also in need of funds to realize their visions of communal transformation. The Society of the Sacred Heart inspired and supported such visions through their "Move Our World" challenge for students, primarily girls, from their global network of schools. Participants were tasked with designing and executing a "solidarity project" that would have a positive impact on the planet or their neighbours in vulnerable situations. Three projects were selected to receive funds from the congregation to scale up their efforts.

Many congregations have been involved in supporting women through community-based women's cooperatives with microfinance, skill-building, and joint-advocacy components. The International Presentation Association, for example, was involved in the Jan Kalyan Gramin Vikas Samiti initiative for residents of slums in

Bihar, India. It included savings groups, systems-consciousness raising, skills training, and advocacy for shelter and food security. In Fiji, the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul partnered with several organisations and government ministries to support Nausori Women Recycling Trash, a small enterprise shared by a group of women and youth who produce handmade goods from discarded food packaging. In Bahia, Brazil, the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary supported the Community Association of Uruçu, a family-based collective that provided training and mutual support for sustainable cultivation of, and goods production with, indigenous trees.

The Salesian Society in Colombia partnered with the Ministry of Industry and Tourism to establish “ZASCA Centers of Reindustrialization”, which provides technical training in all aspects of the textile sector (primarily to women), while securing infrastructure investments and labour-rights protections from government to establish a just and sustainable local textile sector. Across these and other settings, women and girls reported that their association with these groups provided them with increased financial security, improved status and respect in their households or communities, and greater self-confidence and resilience to gender-based discrimination.

Our members have also identified a need to invest in research to better understand the ways and degrees to which our current global systems are presenting girls and women with barriers to the enjoyment of their rights. As an NGO comprised of over 20 congregations of Catholic Sisters, UNANIMA International has prioritised research into how financial challenges are experienced by women and children in particular. Through a series of publications and papers in the last several years, they have lifted up the hidden experiences of women and girls experiencing family homelessness.

Drawing upon these experiences and many more, our community calls upon United Nations Member States to:

- Privilege labour that fulfills and safeguards human rights and environmental justice by:
 - setting compensation standards that correspond to individuals’ social and environmental contributions,
 - blunting financial incentives for labour that is rights- and environment-blind,
 - consistently imposing penalties for labour practices that violate rights, and
 - denouncing Gross Domestic Product as a measure of development and adopting alternate indices that quantify the well-being of our society and ecosystem;
- Allocate public funds to:
 - research on the relationship between women’s financial, social, and environmental well-being and the inter-generational effects of various interventions (and non-intervention) on poverty rates and dimensions experienced by women and girls,
 - legal services for women and girls who have become victims of a crime,
 - mentorship programs linking primary-school girls with young women who have completed secondary school, and
 - increasing capacities of women’s and family shelters in situations of conflict, public health crisis, and environmental disaster;

- Prescribe a 50 per cent -minimum proportion of seats reserved for women in:
 - national- and local-level ministries of finance and budgetary offices and
 - Boards and executive roles within private-sector entities bidding for government contracts;
- Mandate annual visitation of national finance ministers to the nation’s lowest-income and most remote communities for firsthand consultation with local women;
- Amend national policies as needed for nation-wide guarantee of women’s rights:
 - to maintain a bank account without the co-signature of any other individual,
 - to inherit land or other assets, and
 - to retain a share in joint assets held with their spouse in the event of the dissolution of their marriage;
- Expand mobile banking accessibility by:
 - subsidising electrical and internet infrastructure for lower-income and remote communities and
 - regulating remittance and mobile banking fees on a geographic basis to ensure proportionality to local average income; and
- Create a supportive environment for the startup and scaling up of small enterprises and microfinance cooperatives comprised of women, especially those in rural and/or low-income localities and those demonstrating a contribution to the social and/or environmental needs of their local community by:
 - establishing tax regimes that allow a basic level of tax-exempt revenue for small businesses and enterprises, including a higher tax-exempt threshold for businesses owned by multiple women,
 - establishing tax or other financial incentives for private financial institutions that direct grants or low-interest loan programs to this population,
 - maintaining physical and financial infrastructure that enables these enterprises’ integration into the formal sector and access to formal marketplaces, and
 - integrating financial-literacy and financial/property-rights education into standard late-primary and early-secondary school curricula.

We stand ready to offer our collective experience and energy in support of your earnest efforts to pursue any of the above.
