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**Population and sustainable development, in particular
sustained and inclusive economic growth**

Statement submitted by International Federation for Family Development, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council¹

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.

¹ The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Inclusive cities for sustainable families

The project Inclusive Cities for Sustainable Families is a worldwide alliance of regions and local authorities, promoted by the International Federation for Family Development together with the Veneto Region, in collaboration with ELISAN (European Local Inclusion and Social Action Network) and academically coordinated by the University Nove de Julho – UNINOVE (Brazil). This initiative aims at responding to the needs of families contained in ten points drawn up based on the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: housing, new technologies, education, health, safety, clean air, transportation, accessibility, leisure and tourism, and vulnerable families. Our commitment is to present once a year, in observance of the World Cities Day, the results achieved in these areas and in particular the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11: “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. The consequences derived from the pandemic have highlighted the need for a holistic approach focused on integral ecology, both environmental and human. This means identifying the components for an efficient human recovery to build a better future for new generations.

The President of the Veneto Regional Council pointed out during the Observance of the World Cities Day 2021 organized by our Federation, that regions, cities and local authorities are increasingly suffering from the consequences of the pandemic, climate change and natural disasters, which have highlighted the complexity of ecosystems. This is in fact, the main objective of the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, which brings together more than 61 countries, committed to meet or exceed EU climate and energy targets. The Covenant of Mayors cannot be mentioned without referring to the Venice Declaration, whose goals are in line with SDG 11, “inclusive communities and cities.” The Green City Accord, which we support, is also moving in this direction: an initiative promoted by the European Commission that aims to make cities greener, cleaner and healthier.

Homes and families at the center of a new world

The pandemic transformed the world’s established order. Homes and families became the center of a new way of life. During the pandemic, homes became health centers to care for the sick, with great economic and social savings and excellent health outcomes. Thanks to the spread of smart working, homes developed into spaces of production, and centers of learning thanks to e-learning. The message is clear: homes and families are the center of a new world.

The advancement of the Venice Declaration was the result of the collaboration of organizations such as the IFFD, the ELISAN network, the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs and the fundamental contribution of UNINOVE. Acknowledging the new central role of homes and families, the Venice Declaration developed community strategies to prevent and overcome the risks brought about by isolation, loneliness and the dependence on technologies. Home cannot become a prison. One should not live in isolation but in a community.

The Director of the Division of Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations pointed out that the pandemic brought to light already existing fractures, and accentuated situations of extreme poverty. Situations of marginalization and social polarization increased for young people, minorities, groups considered “useless”, like seniors, and people with disabilities or unemployed.

On the other hand, the crisis reinforced phenomena such as exploitation, conflict, domestic violence, human trafficking, abuse of children and seniors. This was highlighted by the Committee on Environmental and Health Crisis Challenges of Governance and Solidarity, of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe. The aim of the Committee is to fight against the detrimental position of the most vulnerable, including families in critical situations, uniting efforts particularly with the signatories of the Venice Declaration. To turn the post Covid-19 challenges into opportunities, it is necessary to devise new models of life in our cities, regions and territories.

Therefore, it is essential to rethink cities' infrastructure starting with the family as a unit and its housing needs. Decent housing and living mean having access to adequate spaces, sanitary facilities, drinking water, electricity, and connection to telematic networks as the series of general services that the neighborhood must ensure. Best practices that could improve the system of services should be identified.

New solutions for a new world

Possible solutions should adopt a new perspective now that the world's old structure has been transformed. To identify and select best practices is a fundamental task. It is also essential to identify ways to meet the needs of families, homes, and neighborhoods, within the circular economy. That means to recover, reuse, recycle, reduce the waste of irreproducible resources, and extend the life of products. Every sector of the economy must be involved in the organization of a new city. We cannot allow senseless waste anymore.

We are aware of the problems associated with food waste; more than a third of food is thrown away. The clothing industry for example, a 1.3 trillion-dollar turnover sector with over 300 million people employed in the world, consumes 98 million tons of non-renewable resources annually and 93 billion cubic meters of water, produces approximately 1.2 billion tons of CO₂, and pours 500 thousand tons of microplastic fibers into the oceans. It is estimated that the current annual cost for landfill and incineration of textile is about \$20 million in New York City alone. A figure that rises to \$112 million and a half for transport in landfill and disposal of clothes and household textiles in the UK. Globally, only 1 per cent of fibers are recycled and transformed into new clothing. Can we afford all this? The new city should be based on the active protection of the quality of life. Quality of life is strictly linked to circular economy.

Another resource for protecting the most vulnerable and strengthening the economy is Social Economy. This model can be a tool to promote the social and professional integration of the most vulnerable groups, especially young people, in the labor market. This is precisely the idea that was developed by our partners in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie region during the International Congress on Social Economy, which took place on October 19, a topic on which we will continue to work.

Importance of youth involvement

We would like to stress the importance of youth involvement in the world's future. This is why we involved the University of Applied Sciences in Rotterdam through the Minor Beyond Borders initiative. Students are working on key points related to the Venice Declaration, namely vulnerable families and health. This project will conclude with a comparative analysis of the challenges and best practices to reflect on the needs of the most vulnerable groups. We are also pleased that other universities such as the Universidad Panamericana in Mexico, are joining this effort.

We hope that the contents and the work conducted in the framework of the Venice Declaration could contribute to the New Urban Agenda, which aims to create

a common vision for a better and more sustainable future. This is also the case for the World Urban Forum, which will take place in Poland next year. The Forum will focus on the challenges of rapid urbanization and its impact on communities, cities and economies.

We would like to end by telling young people to look at the world with new eyes. Look far ahead, look at how we will live in the future. You will be part of this future and this future is shaping our present.
