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

Statement submitted by the FEMM Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special 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

The FEMM Foundation is 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.

Health can foster or hinder essential elements of sustainable development. Poor health interferes with education, family life, and the ability to work, which greatly impacts the personal, social, and economic aspects of people's lives. Poor health also fosters isolation, even in the most developed countries. International law recognizes a right to the "highest attainable standard of health." This is important not only as a right, but as an enabler of participation in the social and economic life of one's community.

Approximately half of the world's population is made up of women and girls, but they remain more vulnerable to health problems due to both biological and social factors. Women often accept irregular bleeding, pain, depression, mood swings, acne and weight gain, as normal symptoms, not realizing that these are often signs of underlying hormonal imbalances and abnormalities which can affect women and girls' long-term overall health, sometimes irreversibly. Even when women do seek medical care, most health care providers and programs struggle to diagnose them and often can only treat the symptoms. These underlying problems can also affect their ability to complete their education, engage in work, and plan their families, which in turn can interfere with their ability to participate in all areas of their lives. Women's poor health often affects their families and communities as well. Sustainable development requires health care that addresses previously under-served reproductive health needs for women and girls.

Policies and funding must meet the needs and desires of women. This can involve examining education and preventive approaches to women's health care, such as FEMM. As an organization serving women's reproductive health needs, FEMM works to address critical knowledge gaps that prevent women from understanding their bodies, from achieving the highest attainable standard of health, and from reaching their family size goals. When women are educated through FEMM, they are empowered to make their own health-focused decisions, resulting in a healthier world.

Healthy women can participate in and contribute to their families and communities. Therefore, FEMM has identified better ways to diagnose and treat women, and also equip them to be informed participants in their own health care. An estimate of only 3 per cent of women understand how to identify signs of health such as ovulation or abnormalities in their menstrual cycles, and many do not understand the delicate interplay of hormones necessary for good health.

Knowledge-based health education and medical care is uniquely well suited to meet these needs while respecting individual choices and values. FEMM offers reproductive and hormonal education and helps women understand how various family planning methods work and their potential side effects. It educates women about the science of their bodies, how to identify when they are fertile, and how to achieve or avoid pregnancy. Knowledge-based programs also have the benefit of being portable: a woman can take knowledge about her health anywhere she goes.

A woman who understands how her body works can monitor her health and seek help when needed. FEMM knows that hormones play an essential role in reproductive and overall women's health. Ovulation is the sign of health in women because it is the proof of sufficient levels in the nine essential hormones that influence women's health. FEMM teaches women to understand this information and the signs that this presents in their bodies. In this way, women are able to identify abnormalities as they

arise, seek health treatment when necessary, and ensure that their symptoms are not dismissed. FEMM's innovative medical protocols are there to support women who identify these problems with doctors who can treat the root of the issue.

FEMM researchers have re-examined women's health. They have found that hormonal health is intrinsically linked to overall health. They have developed better diagnostic criteria to identify conditions that are currently treated mainly at the symptomatic level and instead they treat them at the root. They are even discovering links with conditions not typically considered related to reproductive health like coronary heart disease and Type 2 diabetes which are linked to abnormal ovulation followed by irregular cycles. FEMM takes 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. Informed decisions lead to healthier decisions, and FEMM's programs are ready to be incorporated into existing health systems and address the often-ignored health needs of women.

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 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.

FEMM has developed an app to help women take control of their health. The FEMM app is available free of charge in English and Spanish for both Apple and Android devices. 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 and available in multiple languages such as English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Hungarian, with Croatian, Italian, and Polish versions currently in development. 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, can flag potential health concerns and can also connect women with the medical professionals that were mentioned previously for treatment.

FEMM meets the underlying needs of women in ways that empower them to participate in all aspects of community life. Even women who have not completed schooling can learn to monitor their signs of health. Comprehensive health care for women can now be provided through basic health delivery systems, making this approach to women's health more effective, more accessible, and more affordable, providing stronger health outcomes for women. Knowledge about women's bodies can also combat stigma and myths associated with normal biological processes, such as menstruation, which can interfere with education and economic opportunities.

Women's full participation in sustainable development requires the investment in women's health and health education. When people attain their highest level of health, they are able to thrive and partake in their communities, lowering poverty and helping make their development sustainable.

The FEMM Foundation urges this Commission and Member States to adopt programs that educate women about their bodies and empower them to take charge of their health and to make decisions about their family size. FEMM is prepared to address the needs of women through educational programs and improved medical support. FEMM is eager to assist the Commission and Member States in meeting this goal.