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Statement submitted by Australian Graduate Women Inc, Canadian Federation of University Women, Graduate Women International (GWI), and National Council of Women of Canada, 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 Canadian Federation of University Women, a self-funded, nonpartisan, Canadian organization established in 1919, represents more than 6,600 women across Canada whose vision is that women and girls are educated and empowered to make transformative change in the world. Since this organization was founded, members have worked to achieve educational and economic equality and social justice through continuous learning and empowerment.

The Canadian Federation of University Women has a long history of ensuring that all women and girls have equal opportunities and access to quality education within a peaceful and secure environment where human rights are respected. The priority theme of the 68th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is crucial because, without the eradication of poverty, gender equality cannot be achieved. We welcome the intersectoral dialogue at this Commission on the Status of Women session to address the complex issues of poverty and the multidimensional factors that perpetuate it. Addressing poverty is pivotal to achieving an equality that leaves no one behind.

Poverty, whether defined by an income of less than \$2.15 a day or the multidimensional aspects of living without adequate food, housing, health care and other resources, strips individuals of dignity and choice. It is easy for some in the Global North to think of poverty as confined to the context of the Global South, but poverty is everywhere, including in Canada: over 3 million Canadians (8.1 per cent) were living in poverty in 2020 (Disaggregated Trends in Poverty from the 2021 Census of Population, 2022).

Disaggregated poverty data also reveals gender and racial inequality in Canada. While poverty rates for couples with children under five declined to 6 per cent in 2020, a staggering 31.3 per cent of single women with children under five lived in poverty (Disaggregated Trends, 2022). Inequalities persist for marginalized groups, including Indigenous individuals, with 14.1 per cent of First Nations people living off reserve, 9.2 per cent of Métis, and 10.2 per cent of Inuit in the provinces experiencing poverty in 2020 (Disaggregated Trends, 2022). Alarmingly, the 2016 Census revealed that status First Nations children living on reserves were over four times more likely than non-racialized, non-Indigenous children to live in poverty (Towards Justice: Tackling Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada, 2019). Poverty disproportionately affects marginalized communities because of underlying and systemically embedded social inequities that are woven into the very fabric of societies. Canada, like other member countries, must reform the structures that create and perpetuate economic injustice.

Globally, 1.1 billion people live in acute multidimensional poverty across 110 countries (Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2023). Experts elaborate on the varied impacts of poverty depending on the context. For example, poverty in rural areas, regions of environmental disaster and conflict zones each have specific challenges. The World Bank concludes the obvious, “natural disasters push people into poverty and make the poor even poorer” (Poverty Reduction in Practice: How and Where We Work, 2013). The wars in Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine, and other areas have displaced millions and thrown them into extreme poverty. The Global Sustainable Development Report (2023) illustrates how transformations towards the 2030 Goals will vary depending on the context. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each context requires a critical appraisal to determine the most effective approach to address poverty.

This demands urgent action and the proactive participation of all stakeholders in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 targets. Civil society organizations

must hold member states accountable for poverty-reducing initiatives which are holistic and effective, including initiatives which engage those most affected in building sustainable solutions. We are committed to supporting the efforts of community-developed solutions and enabling national policy development.

Persistent high levels of poverty and disruptions to education during the COVID-19 pandemic are key reasons why the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030, the goal of Sustainable Development Goal 5. Still in 2023, more than 380 million women and girls live in extreme poverty, on less than \$1.90 per day (Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, 2023). Without accelerated poverty eradication efforts, 340 million women and girls will still live in extreme poverty by 2030 (Progress, 2023).

For the Canadian Federation of University Women, education is the linchpin of change, an essential tool to uplift women, girls and communities. World Vision lists the education of children as number one of eight effective solutions to poverty. With 118.5 million girls and 125.5 million boys not in school in 2021, strategies to enable all children to obtain an education are urgently needed (New Estimation Confirms Out-of-School Population is Growing in sub-Saharan Africa, 2022).

Policies and actions to address learning poverty have tremendous benefits in many areas: the World Bank describes education as a “powerful driver of development and one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty and improving health, gender equality, peace and stability” (Education, 2023). An estimated 171 million people could escape poverty if all students in low-income countries had just basic reading skills (How Does Education Affect Poverty?, 2023). UNESCO estimates this figure could grow to 420 million lifted from poverty if all adults completed secondary education, thereby cutting global poverty in half (Reducing Global Poverty Through Universal Primary and Secondary Education, 2017).

With women comprising nearly two-thirds of adults without basic literacy skills, significant investments in education would be particularly impactful for women (What You Need to Know About How UNESCO Advances Education and Gender Equality, 2023). Greater educational attainment among women would not only work to decrease the gender-wage gap and reduce women’s prevalence in lower-income jobs, but also spur economic growth and better health outcomes. For example, one study found that infant and maternal mortality rates are decreased by education (Weitzman, 2017). In fact, greater education among women would drive efforts to achieve all of the Sustainable Development Goals – particularly Goals# 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 16.

The 2022 Transforming Education Summit brought the global education crisis into sharp focus. It provided a unique platform to mobilize action for addressing pandemic-related learning losses and shaping education for a world that is rapidly changing. One of the key outcomes of the Summit was the resolve to harness the digital revolution for the benefit of public education. It is critical that technological advancements promote more equitable access to education and secure employment, rather than widen existing gender gaps. We applaud UNESCO, OECD, and IDB’s call for action to ensure that artificial intelligence advances gender equality (The Effects of AI on the Working Lives of Women, 2022).

Investments in social protection and support infrastructure are also critical to ensuring that women and children can live with dignity irrespective of personal circumstances. Such investments additionally have the benefit of allowing governments and nongovernmental actors to plan and coordinate services in a manner which effectively serves those in need.

Our members and the organizations which support this statement believe that the United Nations is right in recognizing that “eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development” (Poverty Eradication). As champions of gender equality, we call on member states to take the following concrete actions:

- Ensure publicly funded quality primary education for all.
- Accelerate actions to meet Sustainable Development Goal 1 targets.
- Develop and maintain a system where innovations and best teaching and learning practices can be shared.
- Invest in evidence-informed, targeted strategies to dismantle the systemic barriers of economic exclusion experienced by those in equity-deserving communities.
- Invest in community-based, women-led poverty eradication initiatives.
- Invest in reskilling and upskilling of workers in industries significantly impacted by artificial intelligence technology.
