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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: “Strengthening solidarity, social inclusion and social cohesion to accelerate the delivery of the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development as well as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

Statement submitted by *Graduate Women International (GWI)*, a non-governmental organization 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.



GWI Endorses the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development: Advancing Education, Gender Equality, and Poverty Reduction for Sustainable Development, Urging Member States to Take Action

Graduate Women International (GWI), founded in 1919, is a leading girls' and women's global organization advocating for the safe access to quality education and lifelong training up to the highest levels for every woman and girl. GWI has maintained special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947. Our organization is pleased to submit its written statement addressing the primary theme, Strengthening solidarity, social inclusion and social cohesion to accelerate the delivery of the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development as well as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Education is the cornerstone on which a more equitable and prosperous future can be built for women and girls. Education is not only a catalyst for gender equality but also a powerful weapon against poverty. Supported by extensive research and practical evidence, it is well-established that education breaks the intergenerational cycle of poverty and reduces persistent gender disparities. Education empowers women and girls with skills for stable, better-paying jobs, increases their financial independence, and reduces the binds of poverty.

Therefore, GWI urges States to recall their commitment to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Third Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/233 in 2017 under the theme, "Accelerating global actions for a world without poverty." The resolution emphasizes the importance of enacting a multidimensional approach to poverty eradication that includes significant investment in education; it underscores the need to integrate poverty eradication efforts with broader, modern objectives, and is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1, to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere."

Women are all too often the face of poverty. Without the eradication of poverty, gender equality cannot be achieved. Conversely, without gender equality, the eradication of poverty cannot be achieved. According to the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (2023), globally, 1.1 billion people live in multidimensional poverty with context further defining it. That is, the needs of the rural poor may differ from those in refugee camps or urban settings. Further, conditions such as war, natural disasters, climate change, and systemic gender and racial bias can displace and push women into poverty or keep them from climbing out. There is no one simple solution.

While education is essential, it alone cannot solve the issue. However, it is, as World Vision states, the number one of eight effective solutions to poverty reduction. Yet in 2021 more than 100 million girls were not in school and many that were displayed "learning poverty" or, a lack of functional literacy and numeracy. Global poverty could be halved if all students in low-income countries had basic reading skills and all adults completed secondary school. (World Bank, UNESCO)

Any one intervention in education, health, nutrition, reproductive healthcare, and water and sanitation can positively impact the others for the individual. For example, the improved health status of a child will improve her ability to learn. Likewise, smaller family size means parents may be able to afford to send their girl child to school along with their son(s). But, education

inputs (SDG4) have a greater impact on all types of human development outcomes. Thus, better education is associated with lower birth rates, lower mother-child mortality rates, better health and nutrition, and lower poverty rates.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, nations pledged a powerful commitment to make people's needs, rights, and aspirations central to every decision and shared action for social justice and development worldwide.

Guided by the principles of the United Nations Charter and key international agreements, this commitment produced a Declaration and Programme of Action focused on advancing social progress and ensuring well-being for all—an urgent priority today, as it was on 14 March 1995.

Today, we urge all Member States to renew their commitment to the goals and principles of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development (A/CONF.166/9), both nationally and internationally. These commitments, rooted in consensus and global cooperation, affirm that each country holds responsibility for developing strategies, policies, and actions for social progress. This approach respects each nation's unique economic, social, and environmental conditions, as well as its sovereignty and dedication to human rights and fundamental freedoms.

GWJ supports the United Nations in recognizing that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is one of the most significant global challenges and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. We urge Member States to focus on providing universal, equitable access to quality education and primary health care, ensuring the highest standards of physical and mental health for its populations.

This commitment must directly address social inequalities, its root causes, and uphold equal treatment regardless of race, national origin, gender, age, or disability. Member States should also support the unique cultural identities within their societies, strengthen culture's role in sustainable development, and actively promote human resource development. The primary goal of these actions is to eradicate poverty, enable full and productive employment, and strengthen social integration.

GWJ calls on Member States to take the following concrete actions:

Ensure publicly funded quality primary and secondary education for children.

Invest in vocational education and training for youth, particularly in emerging digital, artificial intelligence and STEM fields.

Develop and implement social policies that actively dismantle systemic barriers to quality education and gender equality to support sustainable economic growth.

Strengthen partnerships with NGOs and other stakeholders such as grassroots, women-led networks, to leverage their expertise and resources in the fight against poverty and gender inequality, like GWJ.

Support the Secretary-General's call for each member state to create a national benchmark for reducing poverty. Such benchmarks would consist of a numerical target for reducing poverty by

2027 against national poverty lines (SDG 1.2) and be disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, and geographic location.

Mandate and monitor a quality, disaggregated data-collection strategy to inform evidence-based policymaking.

Integrate a human rights approach into all poverty reduction strategies to address and dismantle systemic gender inequality and racism.

At the national level:

Prioritize lifelong learning by enhancing the quality of education to equip individuals of all ages with the knowledge, skills, reasoning abilities, and ethical values necessary to reach their full potential and actively engage in social, economic, and political development.

Provide access to education, adequate nutrition, and healthcare for all children, with a focus on girls, to ensure their well-being and development, with the goal to disrupt the poverty cycle.

Guarantee full and equal access to education for girls and women, recognizing that investing in women's education is the key element in achieving social equality, higher productivity and social returns in terms of health, lower infant mortality and the reduced need for high fertility.

Strengthen the links between labour market and education policies, realizing that education and vocational training are vital elements in job creation and in combating unemployment and social exclusion in our societies, and emphasize the role of higher education and scientific research in all plans of social development.
