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Statement submitted by Action aides aux familles démunies, 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.



Statement

As President of the non-governmental organization called Action aides aux familles démunies, I have the honour to address you on this traditional occasion to set out the recommendations of our organization on ways and means of reducing poverty.

As we know, poverty is multifaceted. Even if it does not occur exclusively in the least developed or poor countries, it has for a number of years left its mark on the political, economic and social development of women and children in third world countries.

Politically, poverty reduction has been characterized by women's struggle to obtain equal rights with men. Today, in Africa and beyond, women hold seats in parliaments and are at the helm of Governments. They are entrepreneurs and they launch numerous fruitful initiatives. Recently, the African Union appointed a woman as its head.

Economically, women's struggle to reduce poverty has been beneficial. Female literacy was considered a preamble to development. The education of African women is reflected in the growing rate of girls' school enrolment. The gap between girls and boys has narrowed considerably. Moreover, women's keen interest in starting businesses has gained them access to loans by banks or financial partners even if the redistribution of resources by Governments has often been deplorable.

Socially, women's struggle to reduce poverty has been beneficial in many ways. In response to maternal mortality and the resurgence of new diseases such as AIDS, they have often compelled Governments to invest in health. A United Nations study in that field showed that African countries invest nearly 15 per cent of their budget in health.

At the same time, however, women remain the most vulnerable members of society. For example, according to a United Nations report on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the conflict between the Congolese armed forces and the opposition movement, Congrès national pour la défense du peuple, nearly 220,000 persons were displaced at the height of the 2008 civil confrontations, most of them women and children. Human rights are in crisis; rape, torture, child abduction and the forced recruitment of child soldiers have severely hampered the advancement of respect for women's rights in that country. In that connection, we must also emphasize the effects of climate, which have an undeniable impact on the development of the weakest countries, and particularly on women and children, who are the most vulnerable. The phenomenon of global warming, according to the experts, is a source of continuing uncertainty, particularly with regard to the extent of the ultimate consequences of global warming, the pace of climate change, the effects of warming and their regionalization. The experts also believe that in Africa, these changes will translate into greater variability in rainfall and sea level rise that could result in the flooding of vast areas of land.

Given these conflicts and harsh climate conditions which are, of course, beyond women's control, achieving poverty reduction continues to be an uphill battle. Has not the recent global economic crisis triggered by the United States of America — considered to be the pre-eminent global economic power — aggravated poverty and hunger in the poorest countries?

We wish to conclude our statement with an appeal for world peace, unity among the peoples of the earth and greater solidarity among nations. A great man once said: “Fighting poverty is the ability to escape hunger, malnutrition, and preventable and premature mortality as well as the freedoms that derive from literacy, open political participation and freedom of expression.”
