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### Commission on the Status of Women

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### **Statement submitted by Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of the Mission, Sisters of Charity Federation, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

On the day before the Sustainable Development Goals were approved in 2015, Pope Francis publicly commented, “We can find no social or moral justification, no justification, no justification whatsoever, for lack of housing.” Over two years later, the world continues to struggle with the issue of homelessness. One challenge in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls is to ensure that each has access to a safe place they can call home and in which they can thrive.

The Company of the Daughters of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Sisters of Charity Federation are non-profit organizations whose missions are to serve persons living in poverty. They are members of a broader Vincentian Family which, in keeping with the 400th anniversary of its charism’s founding, has launched a Global Initiative on Homelessness.

Ending homelessness, including that of rural women and girls, is critical if the UN is to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 1 (end poverty); 5 (gender equality); and 11.1 (ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums).

According to a July, 2017 report from YaleGlobal Online, about 150 million people, or 2 percent of the world’s population, are homeless. Habitat, in a 2015 report, indicates that about 1.6 billion persons, more than one fifth of the world’s population, may lack adequate housing. About 863 million persons live in hovels and favelas.

Data related specifically to homeless women and girls in rural areas is sparse. Quite often, homeless persons are counted at urban shelters or on city streets. Rural homeless persons are more difficult to follow, however, because they often live in obscure locations and strong systems for counting them are lacking.

The Institute for Public Policy in a 2017 report called for urgent attention to rural homelessness in England as the numbers (male and female) sleeping in barns, outhouses, and parked cars had risen by up to 32 per cent from 2010 to 2016. More women in rural areas of the US are homeless, about 42 percent of the homeless population compared with 35 percent in cities. The 2011 Census found that 60 per cent of Australians sleeping rough were outside major cities. Women and girls traveling migratory routes further find themselves in outdoor, rural areas.

The lack of an address has profound effects on women and girls. It impinges upon access to jobs, services, and even the voting process. It promotes exclusion and discrimination. It further affects health and well-being, physical and financial security, safety, stress levels, food insecurity, and concerns about children. Women living outdoors can be subjected to harassment, attacks, heat, cold, and rain.

Many rural towns are not as equipped as urban areas to provide systemic, coordinated responses to homelessness. Thus, in rural areas, women may need to travel to various locations to fulfil a variety of needs, such as shelter, food, child care, or physical and mental health care. This can only be accomplished if they have access to affordable transportation and money for petrol.

The right to adequate housing appears in the Universal Declaration on Human rights, at Article 25, which states, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, and housing and medical care and necessary social services.” It further appears in the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR0), a 1966 treaty which speaks of the right to adequate housing as “the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity”. ICESCRO requires “adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate security, adequate lighting and ventilation,

adequate basic infrastructure and adequate location with regard to work and basic facilities — all at a reasonable cost”.

But the lack of housing “at a reasonable cost” is among multiple drivers of rural homelessness. The commodification of housing in urban areas is driving up the costs of housing significantly. Less than 0.01 percent of minimum wage workers in the United States can afford a 1 bedroom apartment, according to The National Low Income Housing Coalition. Families, including women and girls, are being pushed out of the housing markets from big cities into less populated areas.

Other factors influencing homelessness include domestic violence, poverty, lack of employment, mental health issues, rapid urbanization, and addictions. The rights of women in some countries to inherit land and other property are infringed by cultural practices and customs. Women in such situations can face disinheritance, eviction, or the loss of land-related disputes.

Women and girls who are forced to flee their homelands due to conflict or natural disaster can also find themselves among persons experiencing rural homelessness. Lack of resources and physical safety can be considerable risks in their situation.

We applaud efforts such as the Vincentian Family Global Initiative on Homelessness. The Vincentian Family is a significant provider of services to various groups of homeless persons, who represent some of the poorest and most disenfranchised people in the world.

The Global Initiative on Homeless aims to connect partners working across a broad spectrum of homelessness; to develop leaders; to share best practices, research, techniques, and operational models through the use of websites and conferences; to encourage and support the growth of new and innovative services; and to lobby for structural change in support of homeless persons at local, regional, and global levels.

With greater partnerships addressing the issue of rural homelessness, women and girls can be freed of stigmas and insecurities and thereby strive towards their greatest potential.

### **Recommendations**

In order to ensure that rural women and girls are not left behind in terms of homelessness; we ask that the UN call upon member states to:

- Substantially increase the number of affordable housing units available in rural and urban areas throughout the world.
- Promote the collection and analysis of global data on rural homelessness, disaggregated by gender.
- Create stronger networks and centres of service providers to homeless persons in rural areas.
- Strengthen partnerships of those entities engaged in ending homelessness.
- Strengthen the protection of women’s inheritance rights globally.
- Ensure access to low cost legal services when the threat of losing a home is imminent.
- Provide additional funding to enhance the ability of refugees and migrants to find shelter and include language ensuring.
- adequate housing for migrants and refugees in the Global Compact on Migration expected to be approved during the 2018 General Assembly.

- Upscale preventative measures which help people avoid homelessness.
  - Provide social protection floors which ensure access to adequate housing.
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