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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: promoting empowerment of people in achieving
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment
and decent work for all**

Statement submitted by Mouvement mondial des mères international, 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

Mouvement mondial des mères international would like to draw the attention of Member States to the vulnerable situation of mothers around the world.

There is ample evidence that mothers, in particular widowed, single or divorced mothers, are among the most vulnerable of the world's population. They are the most likely to suffer from poverty, isolation and lack of economic opportunities and resources and, more often than not, lack of access to social services. Income insecurity is one of the most pervasive issues affecting poor or single mothers. The lack of dependable economic resources directly affects the survival and well-being of their children, causing anxiety and depression, affecting coping mechanisms and depriving these children of a normal childhood, all factors that contribute to perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Similarly, older women, who in their younger years had to stay at home and tend to children and family, are also at greater risk of poverty when their spouse dies. Women outlive their husbands by an average of five years, yet in the vast majority of countries they are not entitled to their husbands' pensions, putting them at great risk of indigence at a time when they must face issues of solitude and deteriorating health.

Every mother has a right to have access to a stable and sufficient income, to educate her children and to raise her family in a safe environment.

Mouvement mondial des mères international would like to stress the unique role of mothers who, by raising the next generation, are at the most important figures in fighting poverty and achieving social integration. In order to support them in this unique role, action is needed in three key areas.

Social security for mothers

Mouvement mondial des mères international supports the International Labour Organization in its efforts to promote social security for all, defined as access to health care and income security, particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity or loss of a main income earner.

Mouvement mondial des mères international urges Governments to implement national universal social protection floors aimed at mothers that, in particular:

- Ensure an income for pregnant women and women with infants
- Provide adequate access to health-care services for pregnant women, infants and children
- Grant sufficient income for ageing mothers who have not been able to work outside the family circle and thus cannot satisfy pension requirements

Only 20 per cent of humanity has adequate social security coverage; however, in countries where a social protection floor has been implemented the benefits in terms of economic and sustainable development inclusive of the weakest members of society are measurable. There are strong indications that in middle- and low-income countries, access to social security programmes is closely linked to a reduction in poverty and inequality, along with other desirable social transformations.

Studies have shown that modest cash transfer programmes for older people and children have the potential to narrow the poverty gap significantly.

This is not just an issue of social justice, but also an investment in breaking the cycle of poverty for future generations.

Effective policies have been implemented by developing countries, notably Mozambique and Thailand. The Bolsa Família programme in Brazil shows that a meaningful scheme, which covers 26 per cent of the population, can start at a cost equivalent to less than 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Girls' education

Mouvement mondial des mères international supports education, notably education for girls, as a key element in fighting poverty and exclusion. While girls now have better access to primary education (in 2011, 90 per cent of girls versus 91 per cent of boys completed primary school on a worldwide basis), efforts should focus on the right of teenagers and young women to receive higher and technical education giving them access to the job market.

Raising the education level of girls encourages development and a better society. Educated women are less likely to marry early and against their will; less likely to die in childbirth; more likely to have healthy babies; and more likely to send their children to school.

Girls' education is not only a right, but the most powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty.

Unpaid care work

Everywhere in the world, women, and mothers in particular, continue to bear the greatest share of unpaid care work. In too many instances, the time spent in unpaid work compensates for the lack of basic public infrastructure and services (water, energy, etc.). Cultural norms and stereotypes further contribute to confining women at home in unpaid care activities.

In addition, women and girls in poor households spend more time in unpaid work than women in non-poor households, in all countries at all levels of development. Even mothers in the paid workforce devote more time than their partners to unpaid care work within the family circle: on average 2 hours and 28 minutes per day more in countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The issue of women's unpaid care work, which too often prevents them from engaging in income-generating activities and accessing social protection, is universal and needs to be addressed. Governments must prioritize the development of public infrastructure and services that reduce and redistribute this unpaid drudgery, promote a more equal distribution between men and women, and recognize the value of such care work, which supports the well-being of individuals, family and entire societies.

Women, and mothers in particular, are seeking a better work/family balance which, by allowing them a better quality of life can help to ensure better living conditions for their families.

Governments have to promote family-friendly policies such as access to affordable childcare, paid maternity leave and fair family taxation.

In her report to the General Assembly ([A/68/293](#)), the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, noted that heavy and unequal care responsibilities are a major barrier to gender equality and to women's equal enjoyment of human rights and, in many cases, condemn women to poverty; and that the failure of States to adequately provide, fund, support and regulate care contradicts their human rights obligations by creating and exacerbating inequalities.

Mouvement mondial des mères international therefore requests that Governments seriously consider including domestic work in their GDP figures and implement retirement benefit systems for those who stayed at home to tend to their dependants and family, forfeiting income in the paid workforce.
