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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: Affordable housing and
social protection systems for all to address homelessness**

Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, 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



Statement

The World Youth Alliance is a global coalition of young people dedicated to promoting the dignity of the human person in policy and culture and building solidarity between young people of developing and developed countries.

All human beings are equal in dignity and therefore deserve respect, opportunity, and the freedom to use their abilities and talents. Countries and communities may take different paths to reach the goal of social inclusion, but when people understand human dignity – the intrinsic and equal value of every human being – they strive to create conditions that include everyone and enable them to thrive. Therefore, human dignity must be at the foundation of our efforts.

This human dignity-centered approach is reflected in the well-established principle that development must be person-centered. It is the intrinsic worth of the human person that provides the basis on which to found policies and laws that create conditions under which human beings can flourish. Therefore, we should respect every human being and work together in solidarity to ensure that every human being is included in our efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development.

World Youth Alliance believes that authentic development is a process that takes place at all levels of society creating a social, political, and economic environment that allows persons to reach their full physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional potential. Development should have a person-centered focus.

Person-centered development is grounded in human dignity and focuses on empowering people. Policies grounded in human dignity prioritize the respect of the human rights of everybody, and the coverage of basic human needs. Lack of adequate housing fails to protect the basic human rights and needs of the persons living in these conditions. Policies based on human dignity recognize each person's ability to contribute to, not just benefit from, development. Human creativity and hard work have driven innovation, improving living conditions for countless people.

A dignity-centered approach requires treating homeless persons as part of the solution, rather than the problem. Policies that treat persons as part of a problem to be solved rather than participants in development ultimately detract from these essential efforts. Vulnerable groups such as homeless persons can easily be marginalized and discriminated against by policymakers and society in general, even though they deserve responses that meet their needs and enable them to participate fully in the life of society.

Under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, each person has a right to an adequate standard of living (art. 11). This depends on several aspects, from which includes access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing (SDG 11), food (SDG2), health care (SDG3), education (SDG4) and clean water (SDG 6).

In order to fulfill this obligation and accomplish the SDGs, policies must address homelessness in ways that respect the dignity of all human beings. People experiencing homelessness often lack other fundamental needs. SDGs 2, 3, 6 and 11 address the immediate and durable needs of people in vulnerable situations, and WYA encourages Member States to ensure that these needs are prioritized in development efforts.

SDG 4, however, on education, can also be part of long-term solutions to prevent and address issues related to homelessness. WYA recognizes that education is a foundational element of development. The goal of education must be to help people recognize their dignity and equip them with the necessary tools to exercise their potential. When every member of a population is aware of how their education

contributes to development, they will be able to fulfill their responsibilities in and to society.

Education should be addressed in two ways. First, it must include access to quality education at all levels that will ensure equity of opportunities for all and address disparities in human capital. But education should also promote peace, equality, global citizenship, and sustainability, as noted in SDG 4.7. “Education about human dignity” as agreed on the Commission for Social Development in their fifty-seventh session is one way to achieve that.

Quality education must be available to all on an equal basis and should flow from an authentic understanding of the human person, and foster respect for self and others in solidarity. Parents bear the primary responsibility for educating their children and should be supported in this role by the state.

World Youth Alliance has developed a curriculum that can help promote respect, responsible behavior, and equality between men and women. The Human Dignity Curriculum (HDC) teaches children about human dignity: that every human being has it, and should, therefore, be respected. The program is culturally sensitive and encourages parental involvement.

Students who understand human dignity are not only prepared to make responsible personal decisions, but to contribute to their communities and to treat others with respect in their families, peer groups, and communities, including in their personal relationships. The lessons they learn about solidarity, excellence, and respect encourage them to examine their actions and responsibilities to themselves and others. With these lessons in mind, they can promote authentic development, inclusive policies, and fair workplace practices.

Young people who understand human dignity are not only prepared to make responsible personal decisions, but to contribute to their communities and to treat others with respect in their families, peer groups, and communities, including in their personal relationships. They will be prepared to contribute to sustainable development and poverty eradication, not just for themselves, but also for others. And when every young people understand human dignity, and comprehend that every person has human dignity, then the reinsertion of homeless persons to society will be easier, and their marginalization and discrimination, less common.

Michael Fairbanks, an advisor to President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, identified seven forms of capital that people need access to in order to thrive. This includes human capital, which represents skills, insights, and capabilities. The development of human capital is fundamental to the development of our societies, and we need to be true to the idea of no one left behind, including homeless people. This form of capital aligns with most of the SDG’s goals, making it a fundamental approach to truly fulfill the agenda 2030 in time.

Human beings are our greatest resource. As the world of work continues to grow and change, it is important to ensure that we include all people in all spheres of life. By grounding our efforts in human dignity and building person-centered policies, we can equip all human beings to be problem-solvers. Thus empowered, everyone can contribute to the development of their communities using their unique capacities and gifts.

World Youth Alliance urges the Commission to promote policies based on human dignity which ensure that all people have access to healthcare, quality education, and just and accountable institutions to ensure that they have access to the various forms of capital to promote inclusion and equality, so that homelessness be tackled as the problem and to treat homeless persons as part of the solution.