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Statement submitted by Soroptimist International in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statements, which are being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



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Statement

Soroptimist International is a grassroots membership organisation advocating for the rights of all women and girls. Engaging with our 66,000 members across 118 countries, Soroptimist International uses education as a catalyst to support women and girls, in all their diversity, to reach their full potential by enabling and empowering them with the tools required to do so. Through equitable opportunities and lifelong learning, all women and girls can have an equal voice in developing strong and peaceful communities worldwide.

The 2024 theme for the High-Level Political Forum is “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”.

Soroptimist International and the signatories of this statement recognise that rates of poverty globally have exponentially increased as a result of intersecting crises. We also recognise that women and girls – in all their diversity – are among those most impacted. Poverty and gender inequality are, however, not inevitable. Rather, they are the result of structural discrimination which has been at the heart of law and policy for decades. In line with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 74/235 on Women in Development, United Nations Member States must actively work to meaningfully and equitably involve women at all levels of decision making and ensure that all efforts are taken to tackle structural barriers and discrimination that continue to prevent women and girls from pursuing such opportunities.

With only six years to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is a dire need to reinvigorate multilateral dialogue and enact sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions worldwide. The international community now sits at a critical juncture at which our future and the future of our youth depends on the actions taken today, including every Goal set out within the 2030 Agenda. This holds particularly true for the Sustainable Development Goals under review during the 2024 High-Level Political Forum: Goals 1 (end poverty), 2 (end hunger), 13 (combat climate change), 16 (peace and justice), and 17 (partnerships).

The impact of climate change around the world has become impossible to ignore and all United Nations Member States must approach this crisis as an existential human rights

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crisis. The rights of all women and girls are especially threatened by the adverse effects of climate change: the intersections of poverty, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and other identities result in additional multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion regarding dealing with the complex challenges of the climate crisis. Climate change is severely affecting and undermining hard-won development gains, poverty reduction efforts (including through food security), and the accumulation of human capital, as recurrent shocks in acutely impacted States are increasingly intense.

In addition, access to and control over productive resources, such as land, water, livestock, and seed, is a key contributor to food security. Responses to the global hunger crisis must account for communities' diverse experiences of food insecurity, particularly how they are shaped by entrenched gender inequalities. This includes women's access to land, agricultural technology, and financial support, as well as the gendered patterns of food consumption, which negatively impact women and girls' nutrition. These challenges are further compounded by unceasing economic crises and the global COVID-19 pandemic, which continue to negatively impact on all women and girls.

In a time of escalating global insecurity, objective recognition must be given to the enduring and extensive absence of women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes at a global scale and within regions and nations. The Women, Peace and Security Agenda, now more than ever, must be fully implemented as a critical tool for building sustainable peace and economically strong communities. Women and girls living in conflict affected countries are suffering immensely, including due to the lack of basic protection, medical care (including maternal services), and critical aid shortages in food and clean drinking water, often pushing them into poverty and increased vulnerability through no fault of their own.

Importantly, women and girls, in all their diversity, play a vital role as agents of change for sustainable development. Empowering all women and girls to take a central role in the effective development and delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions is crucial to improving community and global responses to these intersecting crises. Soroptimist International's Club members design and deliver strategic grassroots projects based on local needs, with the objective goal of ensuring effective and sustainable solutions to improve the lives of thousands of women and girls every year. This work has

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been ongoing since Soroptimist International's establishment in 1921 and has been bolstered by working in partnership with other civil society organisations.

Soroptimist International strongly encourages United Nations Member States to embrace the diverse wealth of knowledge and skills that civil society can provide. Working in silos has proven to be largely ineffective to date. We can and must be stronger by working together, in partnerships.

A disconnected approach to social, economic and environmental policies has not produced the desired results towards poverty eradication and reducing inequality. Policies on economic, social and environmental development should therefore be interconnected to ensure that people, in particular women and children living in poverty and other vulnerable situations, benefit from inclusive economic growth and development.

According to UN Women, an integrated policy approach would lift nearly 150 million women and girls out of poverty by 2030.

In this light, Soroptimist International and the signatories of this statement urge Member States to:

- Apply a gender-sensitive and human rights-based approach to all policies, legislation, discussions and decisions related to all aspects of poverty eradication and development;
- Honour their obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), including by adapting their national laws;
- Increase investments in quality education and lifelong learning, focusing on enabling all women and girls into paid work, education and training;
- Adopt inclusive, universal healthcare via increased investments in quality healthcare provisions, staffing, training and community education programmes;
- Bridge the gender pay gap by providing equal pay for work of equal value between men and women and establishing non-discriminatory liveable wages, with the provision of accessible financial support and training to enable those who wish to develop entrepreneurial skills;
- Implement universal social protection system floors to alleviate poverty by ensuring that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled;

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- Measure and prioritise the wellbeing of all women and girls beyond GDP by deploying multidimensional indicators to ensure quality, disaggregated data collection;
 - Fulfill legally binding commitments agreed upon in the 2015 Paris Agreement and further Declarations on climate action;
 - Develop and implement legislation to ensure gender equality across ownership of land and other resources including but not limited to clean water;
 - Develop and implement policies to build gender-sensitive resilience in communities affected by natural and human-made disasters, including safe shelter and food security;
 - Adopt a legal and institutional framework to assist those within its jurisdiction to ensure their food security, including water rights, land rights, transportation systems, food storage and distribution systems;
 - Fully support all women, including indigenous women, to share their vital knowledge in food systems, biodiversity conservation, and climate change adaptation and mitigation;
 - Fully implement all aspects of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and all subsequent Resolutions;
 - Consider greater use of conditions, incentives and accountability tools, including international criminal proceedings, in order to strengthen the protection of all women and girls in conflict-affected countries;
 - Cooperate with civil society and humanitarian agencies to ensure that gender sensitive humanitarian relief can be safely delivered to affected populations during and post-conflict, including menstrual hygiene kits; and
 - Actively engage with civil society organisations to attain quality knowledge of local issues in specific contexts, as well as action-oriented solutions that are fit for purpose.

Crucially, all policies and legislation must hold gender inclusivity and human rights at their core to ensure equal protection for all, in accordance with international law and human rights treaties including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).



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Soroptimist International and our network of civil society allies, including those undersigned, remind United Nations Member States that the challenges faced by the international community at large are existential. In a time of growing political instability, climate breakdown, and increasing conflicts, women and girls in all their diversity are paying the heaviest price.

Soroptimist International and signatories to this statement demand that this 2024 High-Level Political Forum review not merely be pro forma, but that it actively considers what might make it more effective, more action-oriented and accelerate the ever-closing chance to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. This requires political determination, cooperation, and the willingness to work with the United Nations Major Groups and other Stakeholders to completely overhaul and dismantle the structural barriers that continuously discriminate against women and girls, in all their diversity.

The achievements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are currently in peril. All United Nations Member States have a serious obligation to fulfill as duty-bearers under international law to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of all persons, including all women and girls. Will the Summit of the Future gain impetus for change if Member States continue to fall short of their most basic obligations? We now live without the guarantee of a safe, healthy planet for our children and in a time of unparalleled threats to global peace and security.

To all United Nations Member States, we ask: What are you waiting for?

Signatories:

1. Biovision Stiftung für ökologische Entwicklung (Biovision Foundation for Ecological Development)
2. Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage
3. International Alliance of Women
4. International Health Awareness Network (IHAN)
5. National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO)
6. Regards de femmes
7. Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland



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8. Soroptimist International of Europe
 9. Soroptimist International South East Asia Pacific
 10. Women for Water Partnership (WfWP)
 11. Zonta International

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