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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 International Federation of Social Workers, 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

This statement is submitted by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. IFSW is an organization that supports and promotes the social work profession through a social justice and human rights lens and best practice models. Representing 3 million social workers in 128 countries (IFSW, 2019) and professional associations in 120 nations, IFSW supports the theme of “Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness” session of the 58th Session Commission for Social Development. The aims of the IFSW are to promote social work as a profession, establish national social work associations, and support social worker involvement in planning, policy, and training all within a sustainable framework (IFSW, 2006).

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), along with its social work partners, the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Council on Social Welfare developed the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development to address a number of issues related to social development and to the social work profession. The Global Agenda represents a commitment to promote social and economic equalities, promote the dignity and worth of peoples’, work toward environmental sustainability, and strengthen recognition of the importance of human relationships (The Global Agenda, 2012). The values of the IFSW are in congruence with all Sustainable Development Goals.

The role of social workers is to mediate between state services and family community systems to achieve outcomes that reinforce the capacity of family and community in sustainable self-care and the ability to access social protection systems when necessary. Social workers use their knowledge, experience and skills to advocate within services to ensure that people who use services are treated with dignity and are able to make decisions with respect to the care that they receive. Social workers are advocates for the development of accessible, affordable and transparent social protection systems that are embedded within communities and engage communities in the development of services.

Homelessness

It is estimated that 150 million people worldwide are homeless and one in four people, 1.6 billion, live in harmful conditions of inadequate housing that weaken their health, safety and prosperity. UNICEF estimates that there are 100 million homeless children without parents or families growing up on the streets in major cities around the world. Homeless Street children suffer from food (SDG #2), health (SDG # 3) and education (SDG#4) deprivation. Girls, and boys to a lesser extent, risk sexual exploitation and trafficking.

By 2030, UN-Habitat estimates that 3 billion people, about 40 percent of the world’s population, will need access to adequate housing. This translates into a demand for 96,000 new affordable and accessible housing units every day.

Drivers of Homelessness

The drivers of homelessness include lack of affordable housing, unemployment and poverty, migration, ill-health (ILO, 2019). Natural disasters also impact housing and contribute to temporary and permanent homelessness, especially to marginalized and vulnerable populations. These events represent a specific but unpredictable challenge when considering the issue of homelessness. Personal risk factors also contribute to vulnerability, which then can have a direct impact on becoming homeless. These include: mental illness, substance misuse, family violence,

incarceration, insecure employment and foster care. Finally, a major underlying driver of homelessness is the lack of social protections that prevent against homelessness, unemployment, poverty, and ill-health.

Challenges

Compounding the challenges of homelessness is the criminalization of homelessness – the increasing number of laws, policies and regulations that force a growing portion of communities into precarious social, economic and legal existence (IFSW, 2012). When homelessness is criminalized homeless people are punished both by the penal system for being homeless and excluded from diminishing social aid programs for being criminals (IFSW). IFSW supports campaigns against the criminalization of homelessness such as the campaign by Housing Rights Watch and European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA); the campaign targets criminalization policies and practices and promotes homeless people getting access to appropriate housing (IFSW, 2012). These campaigns address SDG #16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG #11, Safe and Sustainable Communities.

Effective housing programs and policies to address homelessness in the context of the SDGs

Social workers also address homelessness through programs such as Housing First. The Housing First Model provides housing with no conditions and supportive services provided by social workers and other helpers. This program addresses SDG #3 Good Health and Well-being. A second organization that addresses inadequate housing for slum dwellers is SlumDwellers International. This is a network of community-based organizations of the urban poor in 32 countries and hundreds of cities and towns across Africa, Asia and Latin America. Affiliate organizations that come together at community, city and national level to form federations of the urban poor that come together to advocate for slum upgrading via the improvement of infrastructure—water, toilets, electricity gathering community driven data on slums in order to advocate with city officials to improve conditions. This addresses SDG#9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

Promoting Social and Economic Equalities

As recognized by the Global Agenda, the International Federation of Social Workers is committed to collaborating with other non-governmental and governmental groups to create a vibrant economy that serves people from all communities regardless of their social status or nationalities. IFSW (2019) recommends the economy of wellbeing which encompasses a long-term approach that; (1) looks at the impact of decisions and policies on people's lives, (2) is based on a participatory governance structure, (3) ensures socioeconomic and environmental justice for all. Healthy social development for all people requires the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals through healthy, environmentally sustainable economies, that honour the dignity and worth of all through decent work, accessible education, access to health services and safe and affordable housing.

Social Protection Systems are key to reducing vulnerabilities associated with homelessness and inadequate housing. It is shown that there is a threefold return to the economy when there are functioning social protection systems. The Federation advocates for a regulated global economic system that is devoid of trade imbalances and that which is rooted in concern for building social capital that includes protecting and enhancing social justice, human rights and sustainable development.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The role of social workers in social protection systems is to facilitate community solidarity and engagement in the development of systems that will be inclusive for all people and treat them with dignity and respect and ensuring human rights and social justice. Social workers will bring their skills, knowledge and expertise not only of individuals who are marginalized and excluded, but also of groups and communities to advocate that systems positively address structural, social and cultural barriers. IFSW makes the following recommendations:

1. Access to housing is a precondition for access to employment, education, health, and social services. In order to address the current housing challenges, all levels of government should put housing at the centre of urban policies by placing people and human rights at the forefront of urban sustainable development.
2. The impact of environmental disasters, disease and other environmental concerns need to be prioritized through a focus on better city design and planning.
3. Governments need to remain involved in activities and conventions that promote dignity and worth of all people and include them in participatory governance structures. This includes promoting ratification and working towards implementation of conventions, as well as implementation of the associated ideals at each organizational level starting with communities.
4. The provision of social services needs to be strengthened to support individuals and families and assist in mitigating the personal risks that could exacerbate one's stability and housing capacity. Community centres should be implemented in all parts of cities and rural areas to provide local assistance and counseling where people can be empowered at a community level.
5. Special attention should be given to the plight of homeless children, including specific services to aid in their having adequate housing but also to address policy and structural issues that cause children to become homeless.
