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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: Socially just transition towards sustainable
development: the role of digital technologies on social
development and well-being of all**

Statement submitted by UNANIMA International on behalf of the Working Group to End Homelessness 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

As the 59th Commission for Social Development considers “*Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all*” the Working Group to End Homelessness encourages the Commission to consider first, persons who are currently left out and marginalized in our communities: the street homeless, especially children, and individuals and families living in slums or who are inadequately housed. Homelessness is an ongoing concern of this Commission as evidenced by the 58th session. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, secure a “socially just transition,” and create the “future we want” in this digital age, we must view our communities through the eyes and the needs of persons and families on the margins and listen to their voices. We urge the Commission to focus on a socially just transition and advancing digital technologies access for the marginalized by:

Calling upon Member States to provide adequate shelter to all persons and families regardless of gender, age, disability, legal, institutional, or socio-economic status that is safe, secure, and accessible; and to use technological advances to measure and monitor the extent of homelessness, particularly unsheltered homelessness to achieve data driven progress; and,

Urging national, regional and global stakeholders to build on the lessons learned during the global pandemic of the relationship of homelessness to public health and technology and to recognize that the internet is public good that can increase efficiency and effectiveness, if it conforms to human rights standards and facilitates a decent standard of living that includes a home that is safe, secure, and appropriate, with social protections, and services for all individuals and families.

The Working Group to End Homelessness, is a group of 36 non-governmental organizations that witness a concern for poor and marginalized people around the world in programs and advocacy. Dedicated to the elimination of homelessness in all its forms as described in [E/RES/2020/7](#) Paragraph 7, the Working Group to End Homelessness works with the United Nations, global platforms to end homelessness, and academic centers such as the Institute for Global Homelessness at DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, United States of America.

To achieve a “Socially Just Transition,” as a global community we must build on the lessons of 2020 and previous work of this Commission. The global pandemic has demonstrated with painful acuity the interconnectedness of human life and the planet. Building a better future requires a continuing emphasis on the human rights framework clearly established in United Nations documents that place the person at the center, promotes human dignity and promises each person the right to a decent standard of living (Copenhagen Declaration). Agenda 2030 is the agreed upon direction for this transition. As the United Nations celebrates its 75th Anniversary, we reaffirm our commitment to a better future for all people, a future without poverty and which will harness the potential of digitalization for the benefit of disadvantaged groups, economically poor, and persons marginalized in society. Establishing the internet as a public good and securing global digital cooperation is essential for the future. The “Digital Divide” is both a consequence and a cause of social, economic and cultural inequalities.

The global pandemic has demonstrated the importance of digital technology in education, science, medicine, and social protections. It has shown governments that they must invest in essential services, such as technology, water, sanitation, clean energy, healthcare facilities and ensure a quick healthy energy transition. Member States must build on steps taken because of COVID-19 or take urgent steps necessary

to protect public health, particularly regarding sanitation and potable water for slum dwellers and providing housing for homelessness individuals and families. Homelessness, in all its forms, is one of the most visible manifestations of poverty, inequality and social exclusion. More than 2 percent of the world's population is estimated to be homeless and 20 percent of the world's population lack adequate housing and experience one of the forms of homelessness.

The Working Group to End Homelessness calls upon Member States, United Nations Agencies and Civil Society to move forward in a socially just manner from the COVID-19 pandemic by:

- Using technology to help member states collect, measure and harmonize disaggregated data on homelessness. The *Black Lives Matter* movement in 2020 also demands that “socially just” means that countries review data on racism and homelessness and take measures to eliminate it.
- Sustaining or allocating funding in national budgets for emergency measures for shelter of rough sleepers during COVID-19. Not only housing but wrap around services for the homeless need to be expanded by providing greater access to addiction and mental health services along with social protections.
- Working nationally, regionally and internationally, expand financing options by involving private industry as a partner for governments in extending broadband and internet to areas especially in least developed countries to provide greater access to education and services.
- Creating laws, policies and regulations to provide safeguards for people experiencing poverty as e-commerce, social benefits, e-banking, and services require digital access and providing access to essential services outside of telematics. Additionally, laws preventing land ownership for women must be eliminated.
- Building resilience for all people of all ages and genders to empower and sanction participation that is accessible, affordable and usable in their region. Education must be a priority. Job training and digital skills will advance the goals of a digital and sustainable economy. People with lived experience of homelessness must be included. UNICEF has estimated that 1/3 of school children are not benefiting from digital technology and are dropping out of education as schools move to digital education. Street children must be engaged in educational access so that fewer children must survive on the streets. Families living in poverty need skills and equipment as well as wrap around support so that children don't have to live on the streets in big cities while trying to send money home. Information and communications technology in rural areas must be expanded.
- Resolving gender concerns. In two out of every three countries, more men use the internet than women. The digital gender gap has been growing rather than narrowing, standing at 17 per cent in 2019, and was even larger in the least developed countries, at 43 per cent. In addition to women having significantly less access to cell phones, they are often excluded from key educational opportunities. In a virtual world, where women and children may be at home with an abusive spouse/parent, strong initiatives and increased funding are needed to protect them and provide them with accessible services and shelters.
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing with supports and addressing the commodification of housing. Municipalities are responsible for providing social housing for people in situations of severe social exclusion. Additionally, as the pandemic moratoriums on evictions expire, Member States need to evaluate laws and develop policies that will prevent evictions during a crisis, while

curbing the build-up of untenable financial obligations for tenants and mitigating economic harm for local governments.

- Finally, and most importantly, a sustainably just transition in a digital era requires a strong multi-stakeholder effort of Member States, United Nations agencies, civil society, business and academics. Planning for the future must include persons who have experienced homelessness to achieve practical and sustainable solutions.

As we move forward in the age of digital technology, building healthy liveable cities, ending homelessness, expanding social protections and floors, and increasing food security are key to containing the spread of this pandemic, minimizing future global pandemics, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and creating a better future for all, especially the marginalized.

Respectfully submitted:

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Dominican Leadership Conference
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International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul
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