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Statement submitted by Humanitarian Care Malaysia Berhad, 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

Addressing Poverty, Gender Inequality, and Orphanhood in Gaza and Xinjiang: Impact on Women and Children

Crisis areas disproportionately affect women and children, exacerbating poverty, gender inequality, and orphanhood. These vulnerable groups face displacement, loss of livelihood, psychological trauma, and restricted access to essential services.

Situation in Gaza and Impact of Conflict

Since October 7, 2023, the conflict in Gaza has severely impacted women and children. Thousands of women have been widowed, and many children have been orphaned, categorized as “Wounded Child with No Surviving Family”. The destruction of infrastructure and support systems has plunged the population into extreme poverty, with unemployment nearing 100 per cent.

Poverty and Unemployment in Gaza

The ongoing conflict has led to economic collapse, with nearly the entire population affected by the blockade and destruction. Women, often primary caregivers, have seen their livelihood opportunities drastically reduced, compounding the challenges for families.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Reports indicate extensive gender-based violence in Gaza, including sexual violence used as a tactic of war. UN-Women and OCHA have documented numerous cases, leaving long-term physical and psychological trauma (UN Women, Gendered Impact of the Crisis in Gaza, 2024; OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview for Palestine, 2023).

Internal Displacement

More than 1.7 million people, predominantly women and children, have been displaced. They now live in overcrowded shelters with limited access to basic services, making them vulnerable to further harm.

Lack of Access to Education

The destruction of educational institutions has disrupted schooling for over 625,000 students. This has significantly limited access to education, exacerbating existing educational setbacks.

Health and Reproductive Issues

The healthcare system’s collapse has heightened the risk of malnutrition, infectious diseases, and a lack of maternal healthcare. Hospitals and clinics are either destroyed or inaccessible, worsening health outcomes. Gender-based violence has

compounded women's health crises, severely limiting access to reproductive healthcare and infringing on women's reproductive rights. Ensuring women's health, autonomy, and reproductive rights is crucial to stabilizing society during the ongoing conflict.

Economic Hardship

The destruction of Gaza's infrastructure has exacerbated poverty, especially for women who are often the primary caregivers. United Nations Development Programme reports a drastic rise in poverty due to the blockade, with many families losing their livelihoods as businesses and agricultural lands are destroyed.

Psychological Trauma

The psychological toll on women and children is significant, with widespread reports of anxiety, depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The lack of access to mental health services has left many to cope with trauma on their own, without the support needed for recovery.

Challenges in the Orphanage System

The orphanage system in Gaza faces numerous challenges, including inadequate resources and a lack of regulation. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports concerns about the welfare and safety of children, especially those classified as Wounded Child with No Surviving Family, in these underfunded institutions.

Call to Action for Gaza

Empowering Women and Families

To mitigate the challenges faced by families in Gaza, resources such as education, financial aid, and community support are critical. Access to reproductive health services is also vital for young mothers.

Establishing Sustainable Women Empowerment Centres (WEC)

Global programs under UN-Women should focus on establishing sustainable Women Empowerment Centres. These centres would offer psychosocial and parenting support, vocational training, and income-generating activities.

Promoting Family-Based Care for Wounded Child with No Surviving Family

Efforts should prioritize family preservation over institutionalization, with alternatives like kinship and foster care. Reuniting children with their biological families when possible is essential to providing care that aligns with Palestinian cultural values.

Funding for Women Empowerment Centres and Family-Based Care

Funds should be allocated to support programs at the Women Empowerment Centre and provide financial assistance to families caring for Wounded Child With No Surviving Family. Additional funding is needed to support education and the basic needs of children and orphans.

Preparing Orphans for Adulthood

Caregivers and orphanages must be trained to implement strategies that focus on the holistic development of children, ensuring they can integrate successfully into society as adults.

China's Repression of Uyghur Women

In Xinjiang, China, Uyghur children are forcibly separated from their families and placed in state-run boarding schools. These children, labelled as orphans despite having families, face limited contact with their parents and are subjected to a curriculum that aims to assimilate them into Han Chinese culture, effectively erasing their cultural identities.

UN reports estimate that around 500,000 children are affected by these policies, which isolate them from their communities (OHCHR Press Release, China: Xinjiang's forced separations and language policies for Uyghur, 2023). The closure of local schools that offer minority-language education exacerbates the problem, further threatening their cultural and linguistic identities.

Additionally, the "Pair Up and Become Family" program has led to Han Chinese officials being placed in the homes of Uyghur families, often co-sleeping with Uyghur women while the men are detained. Human rights organizations have condemned this as forced assimilation, with widespread reports of emotional and cultural trauma inflicted on Uyghur women and their families (UN News: Rights experts warn against forced separation of Uyghur children in China, 2023).

Call to Action for Xinjiang

Immediate Release of Uyghur Prisoners

We call for the unconditional release of all Uyghur prisoners of conscience and the reunification of women and children with their families.

International Accountability

The international community must hold the Chinese government accountable for its human rights violations in Xinjiang. Justice for the Uyghur people must be amplified on a global stage.

UN-Women Investigation

UN-Women should investigate China's violations of Uyghur human rights in Xinjiang, particularly the treatment of women and children under the state-run boarding school system and the "Pair Up and Become Family" program.

Conclusion

Addressing the intertwined issues of poverty, gender inequality, and orphanhood in crisis areas like Gaza and Xinjiang requires urgent and comprehensive interventions. The international community must commit to ensuring the well-being of vulnerable women and children in these regions. The "Leave no one behind" principle should guide efforts to support children categorized as Wounded Child with No Surviving Family and address the human rights abuses in Xinjiang, ensuring that justice and support are provided where they are most needed.