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Statement submitted by Global Helping to Advance Women and Children, 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

As the international community begins the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and as the 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women focuses on “Women’s Empowerment and its Link to Sustainable Development,” it is as imperative to consider the importance of the family in the empowerment of women, and the importance of women to the empowerment of the family and children.

The International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action reminds us “The role of family members, especially parents and other legal guardians, in strengthening the self-image, self-esteem and status and in protecting the health and well-being of girls should be enhanced and supported. (ICPD +5, 48) This is especially true for women who as mothers have a major impact on the development of their daughters.

Beijing emphasizes that “Women play a critical role in the family. The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support,” and Beijing also affirms that “Women make a great contribution to the welfare of the family and to the development of society, which is still not recognized or considered in its full importance. The social significance of maternity, motherhood and the role of parents in the family and in the upbringing of children should be acknowledged ... Recognition should also be given to the important role often played by women in many countries in caring for other members of their family.” (Beijing, 29)

There would be no development without women who not only give the gift of life to the future leaders and workers in the world, but who also nurture children and prepare them to be contributors to sustainable development.

Women are critical to the family and the family, as the fundamental unit of society is critical to sustainable development.

General Secretary-Ban Ki-moon stated, “[t]he stability and cohesiveness of communities and societies largely rest on the strength of the family.” The Secretary General further stated in connection with the Millennium Development Goals that “the reduction of poverty, education of children and reduction in maternal mortality would be “difficult to attain unless the strategies to achieve them focus on the family.” Certainly this also applies to the new Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2015 United Nations Human Rights Council resolution on the Protection of the Family (A/HRC/29/L.X) expresses concern “that the contribution of the family in the society and in the achievement of development goals continues to be largely overlooked and underemphasized,” and calls upon Member States “to take into account the role of the family, as a contributor to sustainable development, and the need to strengthen family policy development, in their ongoing efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and future United Nations development goals.” The resolution invites “States to consider mainstreaming the promotion of family-oriented policies as a cross cutting issue in the proposed goals and targets of the post-2015 agenda,” recognizing “that the family can contribute to eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender

equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.”

It is unfortunate that the protection of the family and a direct recognition of the essential role of the family in development was left out of the 2030 Agenda, despite support for its inclusion by a number of United Nations Member States.

It is essential to point out that the 2030 Agenda reaffirms multiple United Nations documents that strongly affirm the institution of the family. For example, paragraph 10 states that the 2030 Agenda is “grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and international human rights treaties,” and Article 16.3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” And since paragraph 10 also affirms “international human rights treaties,” these treaties strongly affirm the family as follows:

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 10-1: “The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society.”

Convention on the Rights of the Child, Preamble (paragraph 6): “Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.”

Paragraph 11 of the 2030 Agenda also reaffirms the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits, including the World Summit for Social Development, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and the Beijing Platform for Action. These documents also affirm the family as follows:

World Summit for Social Development: “The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support.”

Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, Principle 9: “The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support.”

Beijing Platform for Action, 29: “The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support.”

Paragraph 11 of the 2030 Agenda continues, “We also reaffirm the follow-up to these conferences.” These follow-up conference documents include:

Social Summit +5: “There has been continued recognition that the family is the basic unit of society and that it plays a key role in social development and is a strong force of social cohesion and integration.”

Beijing +5: “The family is the basic unit of society and is a strong force for social cohesion and integration and as such should be strengthened.”

Even though a direct reference to the protection of the family or the vital role of the family in development is not included in the 2030 Agenda, this in no way means that nations must leave the family out of their national development plans. States should be strongly encouraged to place the protection of motherhood and the family at the centre of their post-2015 development efforts and to assess all development policies and programs for their impact on the family while working to empower mothers and families to realize their full potential as critical contributors to sustainable development.

When forming public policies, government leaders should carefully consider the impact on, and ability to strengthen, the individual family. Family well-being is increased within the family through a “harmonious partnership between men and women” and the “equal sharing of responsibilities for the family” (Beijing Declaration, 15). Equality within the family includes the “equitable distribution of productive assets, wealth, opportunities, income and services” (Platform for Action, 58-b). “Motherhood and fatherhood and the role of parents and legal guardians in the family and in the upbringing of children,” should be considered in the preparation of public policies (Platform for Action, 60) The role of women in procreation should be given special consideration as governments facilitate “access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant” (Platform for Action 94, 97, and Beijing +5, 72-i), with “ready access to essential obstetric care, well-equipped and adequately staffed maternal health-care services” (Beijing +5, 72-b).

At the International Conference on Population and Development, the international community agreed in paragraph 8.25 of the Programme of Action on a common position regarding abortion: “In no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning. All Governments and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are urged to strengthen their commitment to women’s health, to deal with the health impact of abortion whether legal or illegal as a major public health concern and to reduce the recourse to abortion through expanded and improved family planning services.”

Certainly women can best be empowered when they are supported in their life-giving and nurturing responsibilities with children, and empowered mothers are key contributors to sustainable development.

Global Helping to Advance Women and Children wishes to re-emphasize that women as mothers play a vital role in sustainable development, and as we empower mothers, we empower the family to perform its critical role in sustainable development.