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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: promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by the Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, 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.



Statement

The Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund organization, in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council submits this statement for the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development in support of the theme, “Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all”. The organization is grateful for the opportunity to add the voices of its grantees to the social development agenda by sharing their successes with empowering women and girls through grass-roots projects that advance social development in their communities, regions and member States.

Innumerable studies have shown that advancing the rights of women and girls helps advance their families, communities and countries, while failing to do so seriously affects a country’s social development and economic progress. This is why the organization is committed to promoting and advocating for the right to quality, affordable education for girls and women, a decent standard of living, personal dignity, employment and financial independence and participation in all aspects of society.

Over the past 44 years, the organization has already addressed the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the Millennium Development Goals and post-2015 development agenda by awarding over \$2,320,000 in grants to multiple non-governmental organizations, funding 486 projects and reaching over 500,000 women and girls. Recent grants have given women opportunities to make a difference in areas of human rights, violence prevention, craft and business skills training, women’s literacy, maternal and reproductive health, health education, science and technology education, sustainable agriculture and women’s legal rights.

These grass-roots projects serve as successful models that member States can replicate. Funding to women’s groups that understand community economics, political climate, and social development needs leads to systemic change, thus empowering participants to achieve poverty eradication, social integration and full employment.

One example is in Ghana, where an association for the empowerment of women has trained 289 high school girl students in information and communications technology skills. This training was conducted to help prepare and develop girls’ interest in pursuing higher education in science and technology programmes. The skills training helped the girls prepare for their basic education certificate examinations conducted nationwide by the West African Examinations Council. Due to the programme’s success, two women were selected to participate in the national education sector review forum, held in Accra. The forum brought together all stakeholders in education to review policies and discuss challenging issues. Education will bring about better social integration and increased employment opportunities, thereby decreasing poverty.

The World Summit for Social Development put the goal of full and productive employment at the forefront of the United Nations development agenda and recognized that generating productive employment was the most effective means of reducing poverty and promoting social integration. The organization strongly supports this and has a history of successfully funding the promotion of productive employment.

Near Kathmandu, the organization funded Namlo Nepal to provide weaving and business skills training to 13 women. Each woman also received assistance in forming her own business and funding it through the system of microcredit. The project was so successful that 12 more women have expressed an interest in receiving training, for whom the original 13 are acting as trainers. The business teacher expressed happiness when seeing the eagerness of the women to learn something and to become independent, and at seeing a small organization like Namlo Nepal playing a very vital role in bringing about change to the lives of rural women.

A new post-2015 era demands a new vision and a responsive framework that recognizes inclusive growth, decent employment and social protection. This requires increased allocations of funds for essential services, strengthening political will and improving the international policy environment. Sustainable development enabled by the integration of economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship must become our global guiding principle and operational standard. This universal — and universally beneficial — agenda requires profound economic transformations and a new global partnership.

The empowerment of women and girls requires an environment that supports policies, strategies and an attitude change that leads to meaningful participation in decision-making processes and resulting actions. The organization has funded projects in which women living in poverty and lacking access to basic human needs were recently asked to prioritize the major challenges of the Millennium Development Goals and to rank the goals recommended by the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Based on this survey, the organization makes the following recommendations for new social development goals that address the myriad root causes of poverty:

- (a) Commit to eradicating poverty and hunger; 57.7 per cent of respondents ranked this as important;
- (b) Commit to reducing child mortality and improving maternal health; nearly half of the respondents ranked this as important;
- (c) Design policies and provide adequate funding to ensure that girls and women can enjoy full access to education for greater social inclusion;
- (d) Commit to the equality of women and girls at all levels of society, including peacemaking; at 50 per cent of the population, no economy can succeed without advancing women and girls;
- (e) Ensure that all goals are holistic, encompassing social, economic and sustainable development, and inclusive, taking into account women and girls of all ages, ethnicities, abilities, and sexual orientation.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women estimated that women represent 70 per cent of those living in poverty, which robs them of the most basic human rights. However, over 480 successful projects of the organization have empowered women to achieve poverty eradication, social integration and employment. One of the promises made in the United Nations Millennium Declaration was to free all people from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty. The organization urges States to recognize the gaps, accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and frame a new

human rights-based agenda with women equally represented in decision-making and leadership positions. Any new development goals must integrate equity for all and be based on a human rights framework.

The leadership and grantees of the organization agree that it is time to end the marginalization of women and girls, put words into action and bring about social justice under new goals that address poverty and its root causes.
