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Statement submitted by the Anglican Consultative Council and Mothers’ Union, non-governmental organizations 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.

The Anglican Communion and the Mother's Union - a global family of churches and a women-led Christian movement representing 165 countries and 85 million people - welcome the theme of the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women and respond with hope and appeals for action. We have hope that new partnerships between states, multilaterals and communities of faith can enable transformation of poverty on a greater scale. Women-led, asset-based development programmes, often delivered through faith communities, are already making an impact and need sustainable financing to reach further. But this alone will not prevent increasing numbers of women from experiencing poverty. Greater and more urgent commitment is needed to address global division, injustice and inequality, which disproportionately impacts women and girls, especially those in marginalised groups. Reforming the international financial architecture can help prevent conditions worsening and overcome gender biases embedded in our international systems.

Transformation of poverty:

Poverty has a woman's face. Women and girls - particularly indigenous women, widows, women of colour, women living with disabilities and in rural contexts - are disproportionately impacted by economic poverty and its consequences. So often, these women - who are seen, heard and valued by God - are ignored or harmed in our families, communities and systems. We recognise and repent of the fact that this has also been true inside our churches.

Poverty may have a woman's face; but transformation also can. It was women with very little materially who first saw an event that defines our faith – the resurrection of Jesus Christ

– and which has now reached billions. There is ample evidence at local level, including through the work of Mothers’ Union, that women can deliver sustainable change in levels of poverty and gender relationships, through resilience-building, functional literacy training, and facilitating savings groups, working with men to see changes in the community over the long term.

In Burundi, for example, Mothers’ Union has been running an extraordinarily successful literacy and financial education programme for over 20 years, starting during the civil war and continuing through it into the post-conflict period. Aimed at combatting poverty and promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment, the programme initially comprised adult literacy circles and has expanded, as result of needs identified by the communities themselves, into savings and loans associations, financial literacy and business development education, and parenting education. After 20 years, nearly 150 thousand people, 89% of whom are women, have been accredited as literate, a contribution of 2.9% of the estimated adult population of Burundi who can read and write. The transformational impact has also included: 90% of female participants have started a business; and 86% of female and 90% of male programme participants report reduced domestic and intimate partner violence. Critically, 94% of all participants reported sending their dependent children to school, compared to 52% in 2006; 78% reported being able to afford higher education for their children, thus helping to break the cycle of poverty for future generations.

This programme demonstrates the potential of faith-based communities to reach and support the most vulnerable of all faiths and none; to implement a genuinely women-led and community-led programme; to create effective partnerships with a range of organisations who

bring expertise, funding or solidarity; and, by working within the Church context, to maintain a long-term programme through the most difficult conflict and post-conflict situations. It also shows the effectiveness of a participatory, functional approach to literacy in this context.

This is one stand-out example in a long history of Anglican Communion investment in opportunities for women entrepreneurs. In the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil, the Ascension Parish in Rio Grande do Sul has set up the Organic and Cultural Ascension Expo that serves as a place where local producers can sell organic food, handicrafts and art, creating new means of income for the whole community. In Tanzania, Mothers' Union works with local communities to establish savings groups which develop family support and leadership. 70% of group members report consistently meeting their family's basic needs, over 95% with school-aged children report sending them to school and 75% of members report increased participation in household decision-making after joining. In Cameroon, the Girls' Friendly Society has provided girls with key skills, including public speaking, physical activity and tailoring, through their holiday camps. For many girls, this enabled them to continue with their education.

These examples follow an 'asset-based development' model, which first recognises the assets within the individual and community before looking externally for support. It is an approach taught globally through the Anglican Alliance's *Agents of Change* programme and other church community mobilisation programmes. Its transformative impact on poverty comes from participants seeing afresh their potential and agency to bring transformation, which creates partnerships with external actors based on equal dignity.

The need for sustainable funding:

This is valuable work that localises multilateral commitments, but it needs sustainable funding to scale its impact. Partnerships between states, multilaterals and faith communities will be necessary to explore ways of making sustainable funding more readily accessible.

These partnerships will bring benefits for states and multilaterals alike. Faith communities often reach where states and multilaterals cannot and provide shared, culturally-appropriate frameworks in their programmes through which trust is built with participating women and men. As seen in the example of the Mother's Union in Burundi, this can result in female upskilling transforming the whole community.

Churches and other faith actors also have extensive experience in addressing the needs of marginalised groups and leveraging their moral and social capital for positive change, as they are deeply rooted and trusted in well-established, grass-root communities. Churches have historically played important roles in shifting messaging, behaviours and attitudes towards hope-filled action to address multi-layered poverty and gender justice.

The need to reform global injustice:

Individuals, communities and churches, however, can only do so much. Systematic change is urgently needed to prevent an inevitable increase in the number of women experiencing poverty in the coming years. Global inequality and injustice entrenched in our institutions and financial architecture is fuelling division between the world's states. Commitment and sacrifice is needed by those with most power to prevent the resulting fracture and suffering.

These growing divides will be hardest upon women and girls. The rapid advancement of climate change has increased the pre-existing vulnerabilities of women, especially indigenous women, women of colour and women living in rural areas. It has impacted all areas of life including access to stable housing, healthcare, education, sustainable livelihoods, safety and security. Women and girls are increasingly relied on for a greater share of household income, despite facing higher rates of job insecurity and lower wages. Climate-related vulnerabilities were exacerbated by the effects of Covid-19 and have put women at a heightened risk of discrimination and violence, including domestic abuse, survival sex, rape, sexual harassment, sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy.

Without significant changes in the international financial architecture and fulfilment of existing commitments to climate and sustainable development financing, these impacts on women and girls will only get worse. The United Nations Secretary-General has been unequivocal on the need for reform.

While women and girls will pay a heavy price for a deterioration of relationships and the environment globally, they will also suffer as existing gender injustices are compounded through inaction. Without reform, gender biases entrenched in many aspects of the international financial system will continue to drive inequality, with far-reaching, long-term consequences.

Recommendations:

The Anglican Communion and Mothers' Union call for:

- States and multilateral organisations to partner with faith groups to provide sustainable funding for programmes that reduce poverty, illiteracy and gender-based violence, for the long-term transformation of whole communities. Faith communities are key strategic partners for localising multilateral commitments.
- All to recognise that truly inclusive programming, decision-making, social protection systems, education, employment opportunities, and training starts with a recognition of the innate value of all women, the assets within the individual and community, and encounters based on equal dignity, especially with often-marginalised groups.
- States, particularly those with most power globally, to make greater commitments to strategic action and systematic change to address the global injustices and outdated financial institutions which compound poverty and fuel global division.
- States to ensure the collection of gender-disaggregated data, as specified in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to identify where and how women are marginalised.