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Statement submitted by Make Mothers Matter, 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Empowering Mothers for achieving the SDGs – Focus on SDG 4, 8, 10 and 16

“The world of the future is in our making. Tomorrow is now” Eleanor Roosevelt

For mothers around the world – especially the most disadvantaged, living in rural or remote areas – the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer hope for a better future for both themselves and their children.

We at Make Mothers Matter (MMM) are also convinced that empowering mothers can have a wide-ranging positive impact, right across many if not all the SDGs. Indeed, empowering mothers means investing in children and families - a potentially high return on investment to advance the 2030 agenda.

SDG 4 – The transformative power of educated mothers

Educated mothers have the power to transform society:

- The survival, health and wellbeing of children are directly related to their mothers’ education. Among other benefits, education is the best remedy against the transmission of the AIDS virus. (SDG 3)
- Mothers are on the frontline during the early years of a child’s life, i.e. from pregnancy to age 3 when nurturing care is critically important for the physical, cognitive and emotional development of a child to their full potential. (Target 4.2)
- Most mothers are also keenly aware of the importance of education for their children. Their influence is often critical to sending children to school. (Target 4.1)
- Girls especially must have the opportunity to go to school, continue beyond primary education and be supported to go to university instead of staying at home to help with unpaid household chores and care work, or be forced to marry early. Again, mothers’ influence is key. (Target 4.5)
- Mothers are the primary educators of their children, especially when it comes to values and life skills: they are role models and key stakeholders for education to sustainable development, including global citizenship and the promotion of a culture of peace. (Target 4.7, SDG 16)

Educated girls will become responsible mothers who will, in turn, have a positive impact on their families, their communities and, more generally, on society as a whole. These educated girls, the mothers of tomorrow, are the drivers of change.

MMM Recommendations:

- Recognize parents as the primary educators of their children and support them in this essential role – e.g. through cash transfer, parental education, information, accessible public services (healthcare, education...), etc.
- Invest in early childhood education and care – including the provision of high quality maternal and child health care, maternity protection, adequate information on health and the importance of these early years, as well as parenting education and support to parents and caregivers.
- Support girls’ education beyond primary school and address the specific barriers they face – e.g. schools which are too far from home, lack of clean water and separate toilet facilities, insecurity within or around the school premises. Another barrier is the household chores and unpaid family care responsibilities

girls are often expected to assume, due to a lack of basic public infrastructure and services.

- Prohibit child, early and forced marriage, which prevents girls from completing their school curriculum or studies.

SDG 8 – The double dividend of mothers’ labour force participation

Supporting mothers’ labour force participation and addressing the many obstacles and discriminations they face to enter, stay and thrive in the labour market, would contribute to both economic growth and investments in children – the future workforce.

- A 2015 study by Mac Kinsey has estimated that improving parity between men and women in the labour market could add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025. (Target 8.1)
- Mothers are increasingly starting their own businesses, which contributes to economic growth (target 8.1) and decent job creation (Target 8.3) – one motivation is that being their own boss also gives them the flexibility to juggle work and family responsibilities,
- According to the World Bank, women who have their own income re-invest 90 % of this income in their families and communities, mainly food, health and education - whereas the figure is 30-40% for men. (SDG 3 and 4)
- Migrant women, many of whom are mothers working in the domestic sector, make huge financial contributions to their home country’s economy through the remittances they send for the education of their children and the wellbeing of their families (Target 8.1, SDG 3 and 4) – although the cost associated with women’s migration, i.e. the unpaid work of caring for the children left behind which generally falls on female relatives, must be addressed.

MMM Recommendations:

- Ensure full maternity protection for every mother, including access to health care, paid maternity leave and child allowance.
- Address the “care gap”, i.e. the inequitable distribution of unpaid family care work, which remains the main obstacle to women’s full participation in the monetized economy (See also MMM more detailed recommendations on the issue of unpaid family care work on <https://makemothersmatter.org>). According to a 2019 ILO Report, “it is estimated that [at the current pace of progress] the gender gap in time spent in unpaid care work would not be closed until 2228; in other words, closing the gap would take 209 years.” This is the reason why progress on gender equality has stalled and it must be addressed as a priority.
- In particular, engage men in care (e.g. through paid paternity leave, shared parental leave, etc.); everyone will benefit – including men themselves. Sharing care is also correlated to more women in managerial positions.
- Recognize and address the “motherhood penalty”, i.e. the motherhood wage gap, as well as the specific discriminations that women face at hiring and in promotion when they are mothers.
- Promote family and work reconciliation policies for both men and women. An example of best practice is the Right to request flexible working arrangements, which the UK implemented in 2003 for parents, and in 2014 extended to all workers.
- Take also a more flexible approach to working careers – by allowing discontinuous career paths for both men and women (e.g. by facilitating reentry

to the labour market through training, recognizing the skills acquired through caring, etc.).

SDG 10 – Empowering mothers and families to break the intergenerational circle of poverty and reduce inequality

A growing body of evidence indicates that the early years of a child’s life are crucial for a child’s development to their full potential. Neuroscience has confirmed that problems that affect a child's health in this period, such as malnutrition and excessive stress, impair their physical, neurological/cognitive and emotional development.

- When mothers, families and other caregivers are trained/informed on the importance of hygiene, good nutrition, the relevance of the bond with the baby and on the impact of the stimulations he or she receives, they can actively contribute to their children’s global health and wellbeing, and help them reach their full potential. These children will be more likely to succeed at school, go to university, and enjoy self-control and self-esteem in adulthood. By providing nurturing care, mothers can make a difference to the future of their children, and lift them out of poverty, which in turn can go a long way to reduce inequalities in a country (Targets 10.1 and 10.2)

Recommendations:

- See the recommendations already made in relation to SDG 4 on Early Childhood Education and Care. Early Childhood Development programs should particularly target vulnerable families (e.g. low-income families or families from ethnic minorities).

SDG 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Peace begins in the home, both at the individual and family levels. Peace education already starts during the early years, when a child’s brain is developing most rapidly. It is during childhood that habits are formed, differences are recognized and accepted, and that emotional relationships are built through day-to-day interactions in homes and neighbourhoods.

The educational role of parents, especially that of the mother, is crucial. It is within the family that a child makes his first experiences of what safety or distress is, discovers the challenges of community life, and learns the peaceful or violent resolution of conflicts. It is also within the family that a child’s emotional balance is built, and that a child learns the values and attitudes that will shape their life.

Enabling children to grow up in healthy, violence-free families, thus enabling them to reach their full potential and to find their place in society, is the foundation of lasting peace.

- The role of mothers and the family environment is critical to promote the values and skills that will enable children to become agents of change in building peace and reducing violence in their community and ultimately in society. (Target 16.1)
- Educating parents, families and other caregivers on Early Childhood Development increases the likelihood that they will use positive disciplining methods, which in turn reduces the risk of violence and abuse within the home. (Target 16.2)
- Mothers are also key stakeholder to register the birth of their newborn child, so that they have a legal identity – if only they are informed about its importance, allowed and supported to do so. (Target 16.9)

However, the role of women is also vital beyond the family, e.g. in their community, the country and at the international level.

- Mothers have specific insights and skills that can also benefit communities and nations: they need to be aware that they represent a decisive strength to tackle the multiple influences that undermine our societies. For example, mothers are in a privileged position to detect early signs of violent extremism and radicalization. They can learn to identify these signs of unhappiness in their children, which are similar early warnings whether they come from harassment, radicalization, drugs, or sexual abuse. Mothers should be considered as important partners in the fight against terrorism and other forms of violence and threats. (Target 16.1)
- Mothers also have the ability to gather and mobilize other mothers, to build bridges across social classes, race and ethnicity: they all share the same concerns and desire of a better future for their children, beginning with peace. (SDG 16, Target 10.2)
- An increase of women in public life results in lower levels of inequality and increased confidence in national governments. Data shows that the increased presence of women cabinet ministers is associated with a rise in public health spending across many countries. (SDG 10 and SDG 3)
- Women are able to act on the same level as men, get involved in public life at every level, recognize their responsibilities, and trust themselves and their capacities in order to contribute to the development of a more balanced and safer society – the foundation of peace. (Target 16.7)

Recommendations:

- Facilitate women's participation in public life, including in politics, by addressing the issue of unpaid family care work, which, again, is critical when they are mothers.
- Encourage women's participation in public life at all levels, i.e. in governments, but also in parliaments, judiciaries and other public institutions – including through temporary quotas if necessary.

Mothers are change makers, an untapped resource that can make the SDGs succeed - if only they are recognized as such and adequately educated, informed and supported.