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### **Statement submitted by Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

It has become increasingly clear, in light of the inequalities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, that the current social contract has broken down. With the acceptance of a ‘growth at all costs’ approach to development, it would seem that ‘care for Earth’ and ‘respect for the inherent dignity of all people’ have been lost from the contract. Planetary boundaries and human rights have been violated on an unprecedented scale, and patriarchal gender roles have been reinforced. The result is a world suffering from multiple and intersecting crises and marked by deep imbalances – imbalances between state and citizens, capital and labour, the global North and global South, and humans and the natural world. In this knowledge, the Sisters of Mercy worldwide call for a new social contract – one which remedies historical injustices, strengthens solidarity at all levels, and creates the conditions needed for humans and Earth to flourish together.

The Mercy Sisters’ approach to social justice is rooted in the interconnectedness of humans and Earth, and in care for those who are left furthest behind. It recognises that many of our problems today stem from individualistic anthropocentrism, which disconnects us from Earth and makes us indifferent to the suffering of others. Echoing the values and ethos that have been modelled by Indigenous communities for thousands of years and joining with faith-based and other civil society organisations and social movements from around the world, we advocate for a new ‘eco-social’ contract that is underpinned by the inherent dignity of all and which recognises the sacredness of Earth.

Economic justice forms a pillar of that new contract. Neoliberal capitalism has prioritised profit over people and failed to constrain rampant inequality. A new eco-social contract, which reflects the ethos of the Sisters of Mercy, is aligned with Kate Raworth’s ‘Doughnut Economics.’ This theory ties the global distribution of human flourishing not to endless economic growth but to the immutable rights and needs of people and the planet. Doughnut Economics recognises that sufficient resources already exist to satisfy the basic needs of all people. The mission of economic justice, then, is to distribute those resources where they are needed – not where they are hoarded.

This model proposes, first, a minimum social foundation, ensuring that no one is left behind in accessing life’s essentials. Currently, over 4 billion people – half of the global population – are without any form of social protection. A minimum social foundation must include universal social protection floors, access to basic necessities like food, water, housing and healthcare, and enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Second, it posits an ecological ceiling, beyond which lie catastrophic consequences for our natural environment and human life. Sustainable economic development and the flourishing of Earth and people occur between that social floor and ecological ceiling.

Gender justice forms another key element of the new eco-social contract. The roles of women and girls have been constantly reconfigured by the ‘needs’ of the economy with very little regard for their welfare or agency. For example, a massive proportion of unpaid care and domestic work has fallen along gendered lines and must be redistributed for the realisation of gender justice. Attuned to these structural inequalities, Mercy Sisters have responded to the needs and rights of women and girls as a core priority for nearly 200 years. With a focus on education, healthcare, and fostering women’s economic independence, we work to end gender-based violence and discrimination and accompany girls and women experiencing poverty, homelessness, human trafficking, and forced displacement. Our work with trafficking survivors, including in Australia, Ireland, Peru, the Philippines, South Africa, the

United Kingdom, and the United States, demonstrates the cumulative impact of gendered injustice over the life course, and emphasises the agency of women and girls in transforming their lives and those of their families and communities.

Social justice for women and girls is achieved through an eco-social contract that addresses the complex nature of women's poverty and which dismantles systems of patriarchy. Sister of Mercy Angela Reed promotes a life course preventative approach in which women and girls can enjoy full and equal participation in all aspects of life. This calls for the implementation of the 'Optimal Life Course Conditions', which include: an adequate standard of living, human attachment and belonging, quality education, social and community connectedness, safety, security and emotional wellbeing, gender equality, psycho-sexual health and development, long-term life skills and capabilities, social inclusion, economic empowerment, decent work, self-determination, and generativity. This approach seeks to build upon the minimum social foundation to counter gender-based inequalities and build on the resilience and capacities of women and girls.

Our interconnectedness with each other and with Earth means that climate justice is essential to social justice. The capitalist drive for perpetual growth necessitates the ongoing extraction of natural resources. Further, profit-seeking incentivises the use of cheap but environmentally destructive manufacturing practices. To those ends, chronic debt crises, underinvestment, and colonial legacies have turned the environments of the global South into veritable extractive and manufacturing playgrounds for multinational corporations.

The effects accrue globally – climbing global temperatures are well-documented – but are felt most acutely in the already-impoverished communities targeted by extractive industries. Residents of resource-rich economies have little recourse when the extraction of fossil fuels and rare earth minerals contaminates their water supplies, deforests entire regions, and renders agricultural land infertile. The consequences are devastating, damaging the environment and social fabric alike. In Argentina, Canada, Kenya, Panama, Tonga, and beyond, Mercy partners have witnessed this first-hand.

To develop a new eco-social contract is to recognise the delicate interdependencies of Earth and humanity. Sustainable environmental policies would necessitate and strengthen the highly participatory and equitable social foundation described above and would ensure that development occurs within our ecological ceiling. Compensation and support must be provided for destruction already wrought, including through Loss and Damage Funds and debt forgiveness programs. To prevent further damage, we continue to advocate, through our commitment to the Water Action Agenda, for ecosystem-based approaches to aid waste reduction, maintain biodiversity, address sea level rise, and promote sustainable consumption and production. Here, lessons can be taken from the many Indigenous social practices that promote harmonious human-nature relationships – practices of resistance and conservation that have long been subordinated to the interests of colonialism and capital. We must also listen to the insights and follow the leadership of women and girls in climate-vulnerable places.

To achieve a new eco-social contract and the 2030 Agenda, we need a reimagined multilateralism, grounded in participatory decision-making by stakeholders at all levels. In *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis argues powerfully for a reconfigured global politics that thinks and acts more cooperatively. He calls for a transformed multilateralism guided by social movements that arise “from below.” He uplifts the Ottawa Process on the banning of landmines, which emerged from a civil society campaign, including the significant work of Sister of Mercy Denise Coghlan and her colleagues.

Shrinking civic space at the United Nations and the rise of oppression and intimidation against civil society worldwide must be addressed. This will enable the meaningful participation of people who have been historically and systematically excluded from the current broken social contract. As the global community approaches the Summit of the Future and a possible World Social Summit in 2025, Member States must use these opportunities to resolutely design and implement a new eco-social contract in partnership with civil society and other stakeholders. Achieving such a consensus might not be a smooth process, nor a quick fix, but it should be a democratic, inclusive, and transparent process. If we want to harness crisis as an opportunity for change, the time to act is now.

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