Statement

by

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Permanent Representative of Lebanon
to the United Nations

at the

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New York, February 12, 2020

Check Against Delivery
Mr. Chair

At the outset, Lebanon would like to express its solidarity and full support to the efforts made by China to fight and defeat the Coronavirus.

Mr. Chair

Lebanon aligns itself with the statement delivered by Guyana on behalf of the G77 and China and wishes to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

It is a great honor and pleasure to address you at the 58th session of the Commission for Social Development, as we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Commission and the 25th anniversary of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and its Programme of Action that was adopted at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995.

Mr. Chair,

We commend the choice for this year's priority theme of the Commission, “Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness” as it is a pressing and global issue that must be a priority for us all.

Mr. Chair,

The German poet Rilke in his poem Autumn Day says: “Whoever does not have house now will never have one”. It seems the world lives in a chilly Autumn these days as the drivers of homelessness are multiplying and getting more severe, in particular, inequality which has ascended to become one of the most difficult challenges our world is facing today.

If we are to properly address the prevalent problem of homelessness, then we must tackle its root causes: political, economic and social drivers. As rightly highlighted in the Secretary General report, “Homelessness is one of the crudest manifestations of poverty, inequality and housing affordability challenges.”

As our world is changing and expanding, it is becoming increasingly complex and resistant to our current solutions. Take Global online estimates that no less than 150 million people or about 2% of the world’s population are homeless; another 20% or 1.6 billion people lack adequate housing. This is a huge number of people with no roof above their head or a bad roof to protect them and provide them with security.

Why is that? This brings us to the reasons that drive people to homelessness and they are many, starting with structural and economic, like inequality and poverty, to social like family breakdown, to political conflict and climate from natural disasters to severe weather. But homelessness is also due to rapid urbanization and is a result of modern urban life. Just contemplate this: In 1950, 70% of World’s 2.5
billion people lived in rural areas. Today a majority of the world’s population of 7.6 billion, specifically 55%, live in urban centers.

Mr. Chair,

To solve the homelessness problem, we must first define it right, and be sensitive to its culturally rooted components. In some countries and cultures, it is a taboo subject pushing homeless individuals to hide from the authorities, and thus, they are not counted in census.

In some regions like ours, this stigma is prevalent: homeless people strive to remain invisible and are reluctant to speak up. Although this is changing, but culture is strong and change comes slowly. There are more homeless men than women precisely because of that. But because of culture, social networks and families are still stronger than in developed world.

With regards to homelessness, women and children are the most vulnerable victims, especially when family laws are biased against women and governments fail to protect their human and economic rights.

Governments also fail in solving homelessness both because of a lack of resources and because they see it as a problem of housing only. They fail to recognize that homelessness is a structural and an economic problem. Their approach should be comprehensive and try to end poverty and find jobs for these people and not only a place to sleep.

We must address this global and pervasive issue in a multi-sectoral approach through integrated responses cutting across fiscal, economic, labour, housing, health, social protection and urban development policies to accelerate progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and fulfil the commitment to leave no one behind.

Mr. Chair,

In the Secretary General’s report, it is mentioned that “the last time the United Nations attempted to count the global number of homeless people, in 2005, it estimated that 100 million people were homeless.” We can only expect today’s numbers to be worse.

If the UN attempts to count the number today, it will be almost double. This means the world has failed to solve this problem and that it is getting worse by the day. With the SDG’s and the 2030 agenda we have this holistic approach. Let us work on implementing them to give those who are having the sky as a cover to have a roof over their heads and restore their dignity.
Thank you Mr. Chair