

Statement submitted by ACT Alliance – Action by Churches Together

ACT Alliance - Action by Churches Together is a coalition of 135 churches and church-related organisations working together in over 125 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards. ACT Alliance is faith-motivated, rights-based, impact-focused and committed to working ecumenically and inter-religiously with the communities we seek to serve and accompany.

As networks of churches and Christian faith-based organisations working for decades for human rights, development, and humanitarian purposes, ACT Alliance is engaged in all pillars of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. We affirm that all people are created in the image of God, with equal dignity and rights. We believe that reducing inequalities in economic, food and education systems, and promoting gender equality and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is a prerequisite for ensuring human rights and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, rendered more urgent by the COVID- 19 pandemic.

ACT Alliance reaffirms the integrated, holistic mandate of the International Conference on Population and Development as well as the outcomes of its review conferences and the Nairobi Summit on the International Conference on Population and Development 25. We are working in local, regional and global arenas to achieve the commitments ACT Alliance made in support of the Statement and Commitments for the Nairobi Summit, and welcome the opportunity to follow-up provided by the inclusion of Mr. Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, General Secretary of ACT Alliance, as a Commissioner on the High-level Commission. We commit to address the negative effects on access to food, economic opportunities and education during the COVID- 19 pandemic, and particularly the links to sexual and gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights. We further commit to stand up for the integrity of the United Nations and the importance of multilateralism and cooperation.

The majority of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition live in rural areas, where food is produced. While high food prices have been the main triggers of food crises, the cause is structural problems such as food price volatility and failed national and international policies. The structural causes that underlie the vulnerability of the world's smallholder food producers to climate change, as well as the contribution of the industrial agricultural sector to climate change and environmental degradation must also be addressed urgently.

It is vital to recognise the enormous potential of small-scale agro-ecological farming systems to contribute to global food security and sustainable development in a world facing a climate crisis. Evidence has shown that if small-scale farmers have sufficient access to land, water, credit, advisory services and equipment, their productivity per hectare and per unit of energy use is higher than in large intensive farming systems. Successful adaptation strategies must put environmental protection and socio-economic rights at the core of all interventions and actions to disseminate new technologies and practices. Using a justice and equality lens will ensure that adaptation strategies address issues such as gender equality, land rights, farmers' rights, biodiversity protection and —most importantly— fair and equal access to and control over resources, including for indigenous people. The connection and claim to

land, by the private sector, state actors or religious actors, bears a resemblance to the claim and rule over the sovereignty over bodies.

Gender discrimination is a critical element in access to adequate nutrition and food. Women are major food producers and often responsible for feeding their children. However, they face many obstacles in providing for their families. They lack both employment opportunities for income generation and access to and control over land, knowledge and technologies for developing their potential as farmers.

Gender also determines access to adequate food and nutrition at household level. In many places, women and girls are the last to eat and are denied certain nutritious foods due to taboos while pregnant or breastfeeding. Sexuality is another factor. Many women who are single, widowed or divorced, too young or too old, are not eligible for participation in food subsidy schemes. Sex workers and sexual minority groups face the same discrimination.

Additionally, women may lack the power to negotiate for safer sexual and reproductive choices with their partners. Increased access to social services, access to land, employment opportunities, and equal decision-making power in the household leads to increased autonomy for women, giving them the capacity to make decisions on the use of time and resources in all spheres of life.

ACT Alliance is committed to explore the links between sexual and reproductive rights, food and nutrition security in the context of sustainable development. We know that the achievement of sexual and reproductive health and rights positively affects the right to adequate food and nutrition and related rights. Yet in our experience, the lack of access to these services, including family planning, maternal health and youth-friendly services, means that women and girls are dying. COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities and increased the risk of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as the risk of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV. As health care systems are immensely pressured during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to maintain provisions of sexual and reproductive health services—including for adolescents and other vulnerable populations.

ACT Alliance believes that everyone should have the ability to decide freely and responsibly about their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. This entails engaging men and boys, as they are key in promoting and protecting human rights and gender equality as decision-makers and power-holders, and because they are subjected to harmful imposed masculinities.

Engaging with faith actors in addressing these issues is crucial. Faith-based organisations provide critical services at the community level and have access where even governments have difficulty in ensuring an institutional presence. Churches and faith communities deliver comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and help to challenge patriarchal attitudes and practices by promoting gender equality and transformative masculinities at all levels of society, through progressive theology. ACT Alliance affirms our responsibility as faith-based actors to promote each person's inherent dignity and right as part of the divine creation, while simultaneously promoting rigorous analysis of the impact of religious and customary systems on issues like child, early, and forced marriage, as in many parts of the world religious family law trumps statutory legislation.

Based on our experiences, ACT Alliance commits to examining our own organisations and structures, and calls upon Member States to:

1. Fulfil previous commitments and comprehensively implement the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its subsequent reviews with no regression or exception and urge other states to do likewise. This encompasses non-regression on

previously agreed language, including reference to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

2. Develop and implement national plans to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, with particular reference to Goal 3 and Goal 5 and all targets related to gender, Goal 10 on reducing inequalities, and, pertaining to this Commission, Goal 2 to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Integrate nutrition into family planning programmes to achieve healthier pregnancies and birth outcomes, reduce rates of stunting, wasting, and child, infant and maternal mortality especially among adolescents, and integrate family planning into nutrition programmes to reduce rates of adolescent pregnancy, food taboos and the significant health risks this poses to both mother and child.
4. Recognise and address the interconnection and interdependence between sexual and reproductive health, human rights and Sustainable Development Goals and support a development agenda that puts human rights and human dignity front and centre.
5. Protect and fulfil the human rights of all persons, regardless of nationality, migration status, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, ethnicity or any other intersecting identity, including respect and recognition of indigenous people whose lands are often used for large scale food production.
6. Engage in partnership, in line with Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda, with faith-based organisations as transformative actors to change social norms and promote social equality; and recognise the role of faith as a positive force to promote change in society, holding important ethical values that promote abundant life and dignity of all human beings with justice, compassion and love at its core.
7. Stand up for the integrity of the United Nations and the importance of multilateralism, and embrace cooperation, particularly for the post COVID- 19 recovery.