



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by Ilitha Labantu, 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

Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls has been Ilitha Labantu cornerstone in its work for over 32 years. Through the organization's continuous engagements on national and international platforms and in tackling and addressing policies and programmes that continue to discriminate and marginalize women and girls.

Ilitha Labantu's history of engagement in gender equality work at international level, including in Beijing and as the host of a women's stand at a World Summit on Sustainable Development held by the United Nations in Johannesburg in 2003, impels us to raise the importance of global, African and South African efforts to liberate women since Beijing, including the efforts of Ilitha Labantu which have been in the forefront of the struggle to end violence against women for over three decades.

We believe that the global climate change crisis remains the existential threat of our time, it is being paralleled by the coronavirus 19 pandemic which has affected every sphere of life and has put every community around the globe in paralysis. The coronavirus 19 pandemic has made the current global markets situation worse and has had a negative impact on the economy. This has pushed millions of women and children not only in South Africa but in developing countries into poverty, and revealing the stark realities in the system of caregiving and increasing violence against women.

In the strides made by women particularly women living in rural areas towards combating poverty and creating sustainable markets who use farming, agri-culture and horticulture as their livelihood have been hit hard by the major setback created by the coronavirus 19 pandemic as it brought markets to a standstill. Communal loss, and scarcity of food and water may contribute to community conflict over resources and increased incidents of violent behaviour by men, including physical, sexual, economic or psychological violence.

We note with concern that women's vulnerability to the climate change crisis stems from a number of factors including social, economic and cultural. Women are increasingly being seen as more vulnerable because they represent the majority of the world's poor and are proportionally more dependent on threatened natural resources. Worldwide, women have less access and or limited to resources such as land, credit, agricultural inputs, decision-making structures, technology, training and extension services that would enhance their capacity and abilities to adapt to climate change.

The impact of the coronavirus 19 pandemic on the economic system has increased the volatility in developing country markets, where high levels of debt make them vulnerable. The pandemic could severely undermine current responses to these crises, which were already inadequate to address their scale.

The two crises are hitting the poorest and most vulnerable women and girls the hardest, acting as multipliers and intensifiers of poverty and inequalities. Some governments have been forced to put efforts to combat climate change on hold while straddling the impact of the pandemic. In terms of urgency, these two crises are upfront and central to communities and countries alike.

While these global climate change and the coronavirus 19 pandemic are highly visible in the media, another related disaster is beyond the view of the mainstream but is proving to be just as devastating and that is the global debt crisis. The interaction between the climate crisis and coronavirus 19 pandemic is concocting a global toxic cocktail that is as combustible as an undercurrent emergency which can produce triple effects on the lives of women and girls.

As part of our field of expertise, caring for women who are deprived of social services and support and living in conditions conducive to violence, Ilitha Labantu raise the concern that the triple climate change, coronavirus 19 pandemic, and global debt crisis is severely devastating women and girls living in rural areas. In the fight against violence perpetrated towards women and poverty, woman and girls living in rural areas are the most affected population with less resources and opportunities to escape.

As countries slowly start moving from response to recovery and reconstruction, we cannot go back to business as usual. The climate crisis is waiting for no one and continues to unfold even through the pandemic and debt crisis. Therefore, our view is that women's access to green jobs and climate-resilient livelihoods will be a key stepping stone to help us bounce back. We recognise that our South Africa has prioritised the empowerment of women living in rural areas through the mainstreaming of gender as part of a Comprehensive Rural Development Programme headed by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development.

We also recognise that South Africa has prioritised a National Climate Change Response Policy as a comprehensive plan to address both mitigation and adaptation in the short, medium and long term transition to a climate-resilient and lower-carbon economy and society. Ilitha Labantu's view is that South Africa further needs to assess the steps to be taken to decide on climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction economic recovery policies and programmes to improve the participation of women, by overcoming traditional barriers and equipping them with new skills for providing them with better livelihood options, and leaving no one behind.

Although there have been great strides made with regards to women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work and development in the rural areas; Ilitha Labantu calls for strategies that will include: (a) accurate job projections from energy-efficiency measures; (b) raising the proportion of green jobs filled by women and especially for women living in rural areas and to ensure the quality of those jobs; (c) equal opportunities for women to participate in the green economy; (d) equitable access to climate financing; (e) acknowledgement of women's contributions to low-carbon economies; (f) climate change research and training; and, (g) injecting resources and increasing the market for recycling to use less energy, which translates into fewer fossil fuels burned and reduced emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change.

Women are crucial for achieving economic, social and environmental changes needed for a sustainable development of climate change and gender equality. As an organisation we believe that women living in rural areas make major contributions to climate change in that they have the indigenous knowledge needed to prevent environmental degradation, maintain agricultural biodiversity and increase food security. Thus, they must be involved in all aspects of adaptation and mitigation efforts in their communities.

Ilitha Labantu committed to achieving the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action and to advancing the status of women, human rights, and the removal of all forms of discrimination against women. There is a wealth of opportunities for us as South Africa and the Africa region to come out of the triple crisis, stronger, greener and together, seizing every opportunity.

In this regard, we recognise the importance of efforts to promote the exchange of information and knowledge on to green jobs and climate-resilient livelihoods that will facilitate the integration of relevant data into South Africa's and the global climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes. Given the potential density of climate-resilient livelihoods to women, we recognise the importance of highlighting the linkages between violence against women and the environment.

