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Statement submitted by Plan International, Inc., 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The climate crisis is the biggest intergenerational equity challenge of our times. It amplifies risks to humanity and undermines the achievement of the sustainable development agenda.

Despite contributing the least to the crisis, children are disproportionately affected and are shown to be at higher vulnerability than adults to the effects of climate-related issues. The impact of rapid onset disasters and the erosion of land and livelihoods brought about by climate change also exacerbates existing gender inequality, meaning women face greater risks to their lives, health and economic viability than men. When these two vulnerabilities intersect, it is girls, adolescents and young women, especially those from marginalised communities in the most affected countries, who are most at risk (Plan International, Girls' Rights in Climate Strategies).

And yet, despite the climate crisis being the defining human and child's rights challenge of this generation, whilst governments struggle to mitigate the effects in national climate strategies, the human rights of those most vulnerable and underrepresented remain on the side-lines.

For young women and girls, entrenched social and gender norms already dictate behaviours, the division of labour, limit mobility and access to rights, and reduce capacity to deal with uncertainty. Climate change only magnifies these inequalities resulting in their unequal access to health, education, participation and protection. Climate shocks and stresses routinely place girls, especially during adolescence, at increased risk of human trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence and unplanned pregnancies and allow for the resurgence of harmful practices such as child early and forced marriage due to the growing impoverishment of communities. They also cause disruption in access to sexual and reproductive health, family planning services and maternal and postnatal care. These inequalities are further compounded by a lack of access to the information and resources which might help girls and young women to adapt and cope. Combined, this severely detracts their abilities to build resilience and recover from climate change disasters.

The contextual nature of gender in different locations and situations requires caution with generalising narratives however, particularly where increased population growth has been directly equated with higher emissions. Our experience shows that when girls and women are fully empowered to control their own sexual and reproductive health rights, and have children by choice and not chance, this has the positive effect of reducing unplanned pregnancies and slowing population growth. However, when they are denied this right, populations grow, sometimes beyond the capacity of families and communities.

Climate change as a driver of child, early and forced marriage and unintended and/or unwanted adolescent pregnancy in many communities in Global South countries is due to deteriorating, unsustainable livelihoods putting pressure on family income resulting in negative coping strategies. Families often believe a daughter's marriage will lessen the financial strain on the family and mean she is better provided for.

Women and girls can also be less likely to migrate in search of livelihood options and may be left behind at home with increased workload and caring responsibilities that leave little flexibility to evacuate in case of extreme weather events. Adolescent girls face further protection issues after disasters and when migrating as they are particularly susceptible to violence and exploitation.

Upholding the rights of young women and adolescent girls, including the right to inclusive, quality education before, during and after extreme weather and climate events, must be a priority. Targeted climate education has the power to play a pivotal role to promote girls' ability to adapt to climate risks and to engage in climate policies and processes (Plan International, Reimagining Climate Education)/

Adolescent girls, in the most affected countries, face being pulled out-of-school to help alleviate the additional domestic burdens that are shouldered by women in households facing climate-related shocks and stressors. Out-of-school girls are less likely to be able to return to school, particularly once married, pregnant or having become a mother, resulting in them being less likely to be informed about climate change and therefore less equipped to respond to the impacts and contribute to community-based adaptation efforts or have acquired relevant skills to contribute to the green economy.

Plan International's research in sub-Saharan Africa has shown that gender plays out as a significant driver of lower education and wellbeing outcomes for girls and young women. Climate change impacts on education exacerbate existing structures of inequality that place greater value on boys' education than on girls' education, and promote child, early and forced marriage and unions as a coping strategy during times of crisis (Plan International, Unpublished research).

Gender-transformative, inclusive, quality education is key to advancing climate and gender justice. It can also empower young women and girls to be leaders and decision-makers, challenging the systems and norms that reinforce gender and climate injustice around the world. Research shows that every additional year of schooling for girls leads to significant improvements in a country's resilience to climate-related disasters (Brookings Institution).

From a gender and age perspective, national climate policies are responding inadequately to the issues faced by those most vulnerable to climate change. An approach that does not positively incorporate girls and young women as stakeholders in their own futures, empowering them to act now in their communities, is not only failing to tackle the climate crisis today but is creating even greater challenges for the future.

Shocks and stresses can undermine development, trap people in cycles of poverty and deny girls and boys their rights. Plan International advocates resilience programming as a key approach to safeguard development gains from the negative impacts of those shocks and stresses and to achieve full enjoyment of human rights. Resilience helps girls, boys and their communities to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and transform in the face of impacts faced by climate (Plan International, Pathways to Resilience).

The transition to a green economy offers a significant opportunity to advance gender equality through deploying systemic changes which are transformative for both climate and gender injustices. The very essence of a transition suggests systemic changes in society that have the potential to be transformative, especially in supporting gender transformative outcomes, decent work and regulations, and improved skills. The just transition should also recognise and support the transition of girls from childhood to adulthood, especially when they start taking on responsibility for their own household and livelihoods.

Largely side-lined during the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis will continue to exacerbate these vulnerabilities far into the future, unless urgent, bold action is taken now. By 2025, climate change will be a contributing factor in preventing at least 12.5 million girls each year from completing their education if current trends continue (Plan International, Reimagining Climate Education).

Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes requires that Member States meaningfully address the rights of girls and young women during the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Statement of Women. While some countries bear higher levels of responsibility, all must now work together to find solutions through global collaboration and cooperation. Combating the climate crisis, as recognised by the 2015 Paris Agreement must be based on respect for human rights.

We are calling on the Commission to acknowledge the devastating injustice of the climate crisis faced by girls and young women and the disproportionate impacts on their lives; make strong commitments to prioritizing girls' rights in climate adaptation, mitigation and response both during the session and in the agreed conclusions; and support girls' meaningful participation, so as to hear directly from girls' and young women on their policy and programme priorities. The following, more detailed recommendations have been developed in consultation with young women and girls:

Member States should:

Adopt gender-transformative climate action with climate justice at its heart to achieve systems change that leads to redressing gender inequalities, improving the rights of girls and increasing resilience to the devastating impacts of climate change.

Respect girls' leadership by including girls and young women in climate decision-making at all levels, so that they can actively contribute to solutions and response. For climate action to be successful, girls and women need to have their voices heard, be active participants in decision-making and have equal access to knowledge and natural resources.

Mainstream girls' rights in national climate strategies and ensure gender-balanced leadership in climate policy and decision-making to ensure climate change investment and action at all levels is gender transformative.

For States that are the largest contributors to the crisis, mobilize resources to tackle climate change, including, making good on their pledge for \$100 billion for developing countries.

Climate policies and programmes should:

Prioritise gender-transformative education with a focus on resilience in line with SDG 4.7. Inclusive, quality, education supports girls and young women to build adaptive capacities and promotes pro-environmental behavior, and equips girls with the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to tackle the climate crisis, claim and exercise their rights, engage in and develop climate policies, support the green economy and encourage individual environmental responsibility.

Mainstream measures to protect against sexual- and gender-based violence in all settings, including child, early and forced marriage, ensuring that adolescent girls and young women are protected in public spaces, with clear reporting and feedback mechanisms for when they are not.

Create an enabling environment for young people's engagement where their views and recommendations are respected, valued and they have a real opportunity to influence decision making, and prioritise safe spaces, in climate decision making at all levels, for meaningful child and youth engagement, whilst integrating safeguarding principles for safe engagement.

Systematically include young people in general, and girls in particular, explicitly identifying and implementing actions to address the disproportionate

impacts of climate change on young women and girls and ensure their participation in developing, implementing and monitoring them.

Address gender-specific barriers to participation and create enabling environments that facilitate the meaningful participation and leadership of girls throughout their childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Ensuring climate-adaptation initiatives are girl-led will improve their adaptive capacities and promote their participation in decision-making. Meaningful engagement involves listening to and respecting their experiences and expertise to ensure climate action responds to their needs, and supporting their leadership by equipping them with the skills and information they need as well as financing and implementing their ideas. This is important across all aspects of climate action, from reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adaptation and influencing policy processes.

Integrate a gender-transformative approach to disaster risk reduction and social protection that protects the most vulnerable and ensures the meaningful participation of girls and young women in such policies and programmes.

Recognize the importance of age and gender accessible climate and disaster information, resources and policy frameworks. Information should promote human rights and gender equality and challenge entrenched gender norms that impact girls' rights and resilience, and should be provided via different platforms and methods most accessible to young people according to the local context.

Prioritise access to services that guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights. Being able to freely control their sexual and reproductive health empowers girls to contribute to more resilient and adaptable societies and greener economies, and is an essential factor in enabling girls and women to become leaders in climate action.

Empower girls with capacity to take a leading role in the just transition through green life skills to ensure no girl is left behind, and recognise the importance of girls' and women's equal participation and contribution to green energy policies.
