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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 Settlement Services International Incorporated, 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

This statement has been prepared by Settlement Services International (SSI), a non-governmental organisation with ECOSOC special consultative status since 2017. Settlement Services International is driven by a commitment to providing support to and building the capacity of people who have experienced vulnerability, including refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants. This support aims to establish meaningful social and economic participation for both individuals and families, enabling them to achieve equity. As a close ally of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR), and a member of the international Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), SSI supports the work of grass roots refugee women across the Asia Pacific region and is working towards responding to the rising needs of communities as a result of climate change.

Since its establishment, SSI has demonstrated its firm commitment to advancing gender equality, the empowerment of refugee women and girls, and the promotion and protection of their human rights. The organisation is committed to five strategic pillars to guide its work on advancing gender equality and women and girls' empowerment at a local, national and international level: Strengthening women and girls' leadership and participation in decision-making and peace-building; advancing women's economic empowerment; improving advocacy and public policy; promoting health and wellbeing; and, promoting safety security women and girls.

SSI warmly welcomes the Commission's focus on 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. With eighty per cent of people displaced by climate crisis predicted to be women, it is vital to support women who often play a critical role in climate action and decision-making.

SSI's vision is guided by seven key values: Social Justice, Diversity, Compassion, Respect, Quality, Ethics, Innovation. The principles link closely with climate change action and communities impacted by climate change, including climate induced displacement. On May 2021, SSI signed the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations and is committed to reducing the impacts on the most vulnerable and accelerating our own actions.

Solutions to the global issue of climate change must be integrated, collaborative and guided by a commitment to sustainability and wellbeing. Social Justice holds particular relevance to the issue of climate change, as it disproportionately impacts communities experiencing vulnerability, often exacerbating existing inequalities.

Climate change impacts on the sector

The impacts of climate change are superimposed on existing vulnerabilities in a community, this is recognised under various international conventions. The Paris Agreement calls on the importance of taking into consideration vulnerable groups and communities. SSI is guided by such agreements to ensure any steps taken to address climate change are gender-responsive, aware of community vulnerabilities and needs, and guided by knowledge of First Nations people.

Climate Change and gender

Globally, women are more likely to be impacted by the climate crisis. Current events such as conflict, COVID-19, intensifying climate emergencies, risk and displacement are intensified for women. Eighty per cent of people displaced by the climate crisis are predicted to be women (UNDP, 2016). Climate change action and mitigation must ensure equal opportunities for individuals globally. Reducing the

social injustices and inequalities faced by the most vulnerable groups, such as women, assists in the overall response to climate change and can improve community resilience. Mitigation and response strategies need to provide women equal opportunities to be consulted, participate, lead and be decision-makers.

While acknowledging women bear disproportionate burdens when it comes to climate impacts, SSI recognises that women play a critical role in crafting the solutions. SSI has demonstrated that women in leadership amongst diverse communities continue to advocate for the strengthening of grassroots participation in local, national and international platforms. Women facilitate more gender action on the ground. SSI's position aligns with the principles on climate justice expressed by the Mary Robinson Foundation of ensuring gender equality and equity, confirming that decisions on climate change are participatory, transparent and accountable.

Gender equality

SSI has developed a Women and Girls Strategic Plan 2021–2023 to increase the focus on the needs of women and girls within the organisation, as well as those supported by SSI. The plan recognises the breadth of gender diversity, encompassing transgender women, people who identify as non-binary and other diverse genders, acknowledging the intersectional layers of identity. The Plan lists strategic pillars, a number of which intersect with SSI's climate change goals such as economic empowerment, leadership and growth, health and wellbeing. SSI recognises the strength and leadership of women when facing the impacts of climate change and will work with women in their response. We aim to challenge gender inequality and its effects on the communities we support through providing opportunities for increased participation and engagement on climate change action.

The Global Compact on Refugees has further provided an opportunity for SSI to ensure gender equality remains a key priority when developing new partnerships internationally. In 2019, SSI submitted two pledges at the Global Refugee Forum that focus on jobs and livelihoods, as well as solutions. Implementing the pledges alongside partners in host countries has allowed SSI to better understand and work towards mitigating the impact of climate change on refugee and host populations.

SSI strongly encourages organisations to endorse the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations and to begin implementing the key commitments. Climate justice and gender equality are complementary, equal access to information and opportunities will result in better planning, risk-reduction, mitigation and sustainability. SSI recognises that we have a collective responsibility to alleviate the burdens of climate change on the most vulnerable communities globally.