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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 Associated Country Women of the World, Association of Families and Women in Rural Areas, Campanha Latino-Americana pelo Direito à Educação – CLADE Brasil, Casa Generalizia della Societa’ del Sacro Cuore, Center for Integrated Rural and Child Development, Commonwealth Medical Trust, Conseil international des organisations de festivals de folklore et d’arts traditionnels, Institute of Cultural Affairs International, International Alliance of Women, International Association for Public Participation Australasia Limited, International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience, association sans but lucratif, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Kongres Wanita Indonesia, Make Mothers Matter, Mother’s Union, National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, New Humanity, Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform, Red Dot Foundation, Solar Cookers International, Soroptimist International, Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Limited, Widows Rights International, Widows for Peace through Democracy, Women for Water Partnership, Women’s Union of Russia, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, World Organization of the Scout Movement, and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations 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 priority theme for the Sixty-Sixth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women must be, for all of us, more than just a theme and instead become a mission statement for the decade ahead. The Associated Country Women, representing more than 9 million rural women across 82 countries, and a coalition of 28 Civil Society partners spanning the globe and representing millions of women believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the urgent need for genuine equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in all their diversity. The drastic, unparalleled, and disproportionate impact of climate change and associated environmental disaster on women places this need in a timeframe of urgency. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Sustainable Development Goals have all pressed for this change, and we cannot wait any longer.

The greatest barrier standing in the way of progress is the lack of action on the part of governments who choose to ignore the reality of life for women and girls, those same women and girls upon whose labour the success of the nation depends.

In almost every nation, rural women are subject to intersecting forms of discrimination, violence, and disproportionate poverty. The increase in domestic and gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic shows just how volatile the reality of life is for women around the world. As well as bearing the responsibility for the vast majority of the world's unpaid care work and obligations relating to family, rural women are less secure in their employment, less likely to advance or be paid the same as the men around them, and more likely to be attacked in their homes after a day's hard work. Food and water insecurity are combined with unstable living conditions in so many parts of the world. These inequalities manifest in developing and less-developed states, but also dominate the lives of women in so-called developed nations too.

We support the Secretary-General's conclusion in the Key Proposals from the Common Agenda, in that all States Parties must place women and girls at the centre of their agendas. We agree that "Climate change will be an added stressor that will aggravate women's vulnerability" and we agree that the damage to homes, livelihoods, and communities caused by climate change mean that women and girls – already left furthest behind – face reducing opportunities to achieve their potential.

Rural women account for 25 per cent of the world's population but are often ignored and dismissed by international agreements, processes, and the governments who implement them. We welcome the inclusion of text that highlights the need for geographic location to be considered when assessing women's human rights, and would draw attention to the reality that those women in communities furthest from administrative centres are often also those furthest from participation in decision-making, particularly in conflicts, post-conflict areas, and all too frequently in humanitarian emergencies. Special attention must be paid to ensure the inclusion of rural women, including girls and widows, and those forgotten by all but those who would target them for violence.

Recommendations

Climate change, disasters and crises reveal and compound existing inequalities, including gender inequality. To move towards gender and climate justice, the coalition of Civil Society Organisations listed below recommend that States:

- Use gender-transformative and human rights-based approaches across environmental, sustainability, and disaster risk reduction programmes in order to best support sustainable development, recover and future resilience.

- Recognise and use the expertise of local, indigenous and rural women who know their local environments best.
- Increase efforts to partner with local women-led civil society organisations who have the on-the-ground knowledge of environmental and social needs. These women frequently hold a position of trust within communities, making them best-placed to enact sensitive projects and to work from the grassroots up.
- Improve living conditions and access to sustainable technologies, to ensure people can take action to preserve their environment.
- Reduce barriers to sustainable technologies and close the gender technology divide, including through global cooperation and technology sharing and improving living conditions and access to sustainable technologies to ensure people can take action to preserve their environment.
- Improve resources to build community resilience and improve sustainable infrastructure.
- Expand and enhance of economic opportunities for women and girls through well-planned programmes that respond to community needs. An environmental dimension should be built into economic programmes, particularly those targeted at the economic empowerment of women and girls, including widows and those who are separated from their families for economic reasons.
- Elaborate on laws to protect women working in informal sectors. All International Labour Organisation member states should ratify Convention 190 as part of their gender equality efforts.
- Recognition of the specific challenges faced by women in multiple and intersecting groups, including urgently making safe water, sanitation and hygiene facilities universally available, particularly in rural areas. Increase support to facilitate local action to achieve this in an environmentally sustainable way. Governments should incentivise environmentally friendly behaviour, but also to introduce effective penalties for practices that are proven to harm ecosystems and threaten our collective future.
- Prioritise clean cooking by scaling access to affordable and sustainable cooking appliances, such as solar cookers, which use free solar-thermal energy, improve human and environmental health, help achieve gender equality and empower women and girls
- Use human rights outcomes of sustainable development programmes should be used for monitoring and evaluation. Progress measured by both qualitative and quantitative measures for human rights must be used as a marker of success for programmes.
- Continue to develop of capacities for disaggregated data collection, interpretation and analysis, including creating new qualitative indicators. To understand the quality of sustainable development activities is vital to assessing whether the Sustainable Development Goals and gender equality have been achieved.

Human action is changing the Earth's climate in unprecedented ways. Only human action can limit future climate change. Our recommendations are actions, which can be taken now to benefit women, girls and the environment.

Time has run out. A lack of political will is no longer an excuse. States must act now to ensure the preservation of the planet and the realisation of human rights for all women and girls.

This statement is respectfully submitted by the Associated Country Women of the World, and co-signed by the following coalition of non-governmental organisations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council:

Association of Families and Women in Rural Areas
Campanha Latino-Americana pelo Direito à Educação – CLADE Brasil
Casa Generalizia della Societa' del Sacro Cuore
Center for Integrated Rural and Child Development
Commonwealth Medical Trust
Conseil international des organisations de festivals de folklore et d'arts traditionnels
Institute of Cultural Affairs International
International Alliance of Women
International Association for Public Participation Australasia Limited
International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience, association sans but lucratif
International Federation of Business and Professional Women
Kongres Wanita Indonesia
Make Mothers Matter
Mothers' Union
National Alliance of Women's Organizations
New Humanity
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
Red Dot Foundation
Solar Cookers International
Soroptimist International
Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Limited
Widow's Rights International
Widows for Peace through Democracy
Women for Water Partnership
Women's Union of Russia
World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts
World Organization of the Scout Movement
Zonta International
