



## 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 Canadian Federation of University Women, Federación Mexicana de Universitarias, Graduate Women International (GWI), and Women Graduates – USA, Inc., 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Women Graduates-USA is a member organization based in the United States with a focus on national issues having international implications. Our main areas of programme and advocacy are Education, Violence Against Women with an emphasis on Human Trafficking in all its forms, Women's Global Health, Education including equal and safe access to education for refugees especially women and girls and support for the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, 5, 10 and 17.

According to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report, climate change is widespread, rapid and intensifying with changes in the Earth's climate in every region and across the whole climate system. Covid-19 merely paused, but did not slow, this relentless advance. Rising global temperatures causing extreme weather throughout the world, impact economies and societies and reinforce the imperative for climate action to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and the need to commit effectively to climate agreements such as the Paris Agreement.

Climate change adversely affects the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, particularly women and girls (UNDP Linkages Gender and CC Policy Brief, 2016). Time is critical and action is needed to protect their most essential rights.

Climate change is the single biggest, alarming health threat facing humanity, already harming women's health disproportionality through air pollution, poor water quality, rampant disease, extreme weather events, forced displacement, food insecurity and pressures on mental health. Combined with the multiple impacts of social determinants, we are witnessing an exacerbated deterioration of women's health, compounded by the lack of good healthcare in US and globally. Shockingly 80 per cent people displaced by climate change are women and are 14 times more likely to suffer health consequences and die during disasters like Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Tsunami in Haiti. Climate change, pollution, destruction of environment equally impacts both hemispheres with a reverberating intertwined negative effect on women.

Due to economic factors, social construction, persisting gender discrimination and harmful gender norms Education, a basic human right for all but especially for women and girls, continues to be under severe threat as we move further into the climate crisis. 11 million girls will not return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO COVID-19 education response: how many students are at risk of not returning to school? Advocacy paper, 30 July 2020), proving that girls are too often the first to be sacrificed in times of crisis, as they are forced to drop out of school to help their families with domestic chores. All this increases the risk of child marriage, gender-based violence, dependence and poverty.

Women Graduates-USA believes that quality education of all women and girls will expose the global community to a transformative power never seen before and will function as an inclusive force for half of its population. Women Graduates-USA therefore urges member states to recognise that women and girls' participation at all levels of the climate crisis solution is imperative and, in the long run, will make a the positive difference.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), "climate change is the defining crisis of our time and disaster displacement one of its most devastating consequences." The impacts of climate change can trigger displacement, worsen living conditions, hamper return for those already displaced and exacerbate existing tensions, adding to the potential for conflicts. Drinking water is often scarce in parts

of the world hosting refugees, crops and livestock struggle to survive where conditions become too hot and dry, or too cold and wet.

Women displaced by disaster face increased protection risks such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), exploitation and trafficking; have limited access to healthcare impeding access to life-saving health services, including reproductive and mental health services; suffer difficulties of adaptation due to socio-cultural norms, restricted livelihood options, lack of access to formalized safety nets; have difficulty benefiting from technologies and information; lack financial assets and limited rights to land and property. Lacking resources and freedom to move, women become trapped in areas where climate and disaster risk is high (Gender, Displacement and Climate Change July, UNHCR, 2020).

Women Graduates-USA therefore urges member states to: reaffirm the Global Compact on Refugees, affirmed in by the UN General Assembly in 2018; and provide comprehensive immigration policies by countries faced with an inflow of migrants seeking refuge from the impacts of climate change in their home countries such as violence, hunger or unstable economies. Proper oversight of point-of-entry countries is needed through implementation of humane processing systems for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Systems or policies that honour the human rights of all migrants require establishing accountability measures for point-of-entry countries to uphold (Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Supplement No. 12 [[A/73/12 \(Part II\)](#)]).

Women and girls constitute 70 per cent of the world's poor, rendering them uniquely vulnerable to the climate crisis (International Labour Organisation (ILO), Facts on Women at Work. The poor, primarily in developing countries, are expected to be disproportionately affected by climate variability and change. Both women and men working in natural resource sectors, such as agriculture, are likely to be affected. However, the impact of climate change on gender is not the same. Women predominate in the world's food production, but they own less than 10 per cent of the land. Women generally are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood, particularly in rural areas where they shoulder the major responsibility for household water supply and energy for cooking and heating, as well as for food security. Women have limited access to and control of environmental goods and services. During extreme weather such as droughts and floods, women tend to work more to secure household livelihoods leaving them less time to access training and education, develop skills or earn an income. Socio-cultural norms and childcare responsibilities prevent women from migrating or seeking refuge in other places and generally suffer gender inequalities with respect to human rights, political and economic status, land ownership, housing conditions, exposure to violence, education and health. Women Graduates-USA believes It is time to put an end to this cycle.

Women Graduates-USA also emphasizes the contribution made by women to mitigate local climate impact and create resilient communities. Women are in the best situations to devise solutions promoting best practices and policies for economic security, health and well-being (including mental and reproductive health), and to address general inequalities including equal distribution of resources during crises.

Finally, Women Graduates-USA calls upon international, national and local governments, the business sector, civil society and academia to fully recognize the impact of global warming and climate change on every aspect of life, the sustainability of our human existence and the viability of our planet and to create mechanisms that will provide for the protection of women's and girls' rights against systemic discrimination, gender inequality and gender-based violence that commonly occur under crisis situations that exacerbate already existing risks of rights violations.

Submitted by Women Graduates – USA, Inc.

Co-sponsored by:

Canadian Federation of University Women  
Federación Mexicana de Universitarias  
Graduate Women International (GWI)

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