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Statement submitted by Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) and Orchid Project Limited, 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

Intersection between Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting and Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

Climate change is a global phenomenon that impacts everyone around the world, yet it exacerbates pre-existing gender inequality, and its most negative impacts are borne disproportionately by girls, more than any other age or gender demographic. Deeply entrenched harmful gender roles and reduced access to natural resources make women and girls more exposed to climate risks and the associated poverty risks as a result of climate change. UN figures indicate that women and girls also compose 80 percent of people displaced by climate change.

Women and girls are disproportionately impacted due to existing gender inequalities that are perpetuated by patriarchal society, harmful gender norms, political and economic structures. Additionally, they are faced with the added burden within their households, which deters them from playing their role as agents of change to address climate change.

Extreme weather events mean fewer resources closer to home, and girls and women who are largely responsible for tasks, such as collecting water and firewood have to travel greater distances. This responsibility does not only keep girls away from school, affecting their learning and income generation opportunities in future, but also exposes them to risks of physical and sexual violence on the way.

While the relation between climate change and gender inequality broadly is more widely established, and provisions to ensure support to women are included in the overarching text and operational articles of the Paris Climate Agreement, the intersections between climate change and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is not widely acknowledged. Surveys conducted to examine the intersection of FGM/C and climate change demonstrate a link between dwindling livelihoods affected by climate change and increased risk of harmful practices such as FGM/C. Floods, droughts and natural disasters force farmers out of work by destroying their crops, livestock and homes. As an adaptive strategy to deal with affected livelihoods, families often resort to marrying off their daughters young, so they have less mouths to feed. Dowries are also a further incentive. Because FGM/C is often linked to girl's marriageability and the need to control her sexuality and protect her "honour", female genital cutting often becomes a precursor to marriage.

In its turn, the COVID-19 pandemic has, similar to previous humanitarian crises, including outbreaks, compounded existing gender inequalities. It resulted in an alarming upsurge of "shadow pandemic" of violence against women and girls, including FGM/C. Lockdowns, school closures and diversion of sexual and reproductive health services to the immediate health impacts of COVID-19 have slowed down the progress and enabled undetected opportunities to carry out the practice, undoing years of progress to end FGM/C.

To be able to put a sustainable end to female genital mutilation/cutting, the practice should be viewed within contextual complexities of the practicing communities and should be addressed through a multisectoral response to end the practice. When examining the socio-ecological factors that increase the risk or recurrence of FGM/C, the potential impact of climate change, environmental and disaster risks need to be considered.

Call for Action to Member States

Female genital mutilation or cutting is a human rights violation and a form of violence against women and girls rooted in gender inequality. 200 million girls and women in the world today are estimated to have undergone FGM/C, and more than 4 million girls are at risk of cutting every year. Despite decades of efforts to abandon the practice, they have not yet been able to effectively curb the number of women and girls subjected to the practice.

FGM/C has been documented in many countries across Asia, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Brunei, Thailand, the Philippines, Maldives, India and Pakistan. In the highest prevalence countries in the region – Malaysia and Indonesia – the practice is carried out mainly on infants and young girls. As the result of COVID-19 outbreak, and similar to the rest of the world, sexual and reproductive health services in Asia and the Pacific region, have been defunded, deprioritised, and even rolled back in favour of those directly responding to COVID-19. In Malaysia, family planning clinics have had to scale down or postpone their work indefinitely, as health services only offer COVID-19 related services, despite survivors of FGM/C being reliant on SRHR services. In Indonesia, service providers and safe houses have been closed.

Global commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals to end Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting will not be reached by 2030 if efforts to end FGM/C are not rooted in tackling existing inequalities and remain siloed from other development and humanitarian clusters.

Ahead of the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we are calling on Member States to:

1. Integrate Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Climate change and Disaster Preparedness, Resilience and Response Plans.

- Prioritise mainstreaming of FGM/C into crisis response and recovery work, including GBV and SRHR programming in both development and humanitarian contexts.
- Adopt comprehensive, evidence-based national action plans that involve stakeholders from other sectors, including ensuring the plans are adequately resourced and referral mechanisms established.
- Increase representation of girls and women in decision-making for COVID-19 and climate change preparedness and response to ensure their perspectives are heard, including on the increased risk of FGM/C.
- Implement commitments under the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Feminist Action on Climate Justice, including strengthening the capacity of women and girls to build resilience to climate and disaster risks and achieve resource independence.
- Gather data on prevalence of FGM/C in countries affected by humanitarian crisis.

2. Increase funding to the sector, and in particular, towards grassroots and women-led organisations.

UNFPA estimated that an additional 2 million girls will be at risk of undergoing female genital mutilation by 2030 due to Covid-19.

- Urgently increase funding to grassroots and women-led organisations working to end FGM/C, including greater provision for emergency, flexible cash-based

assistance during humanitarian crises, to reverse the negative trend caused by Covid-19.

- Strengthen capacity building of and technical assistance to grassroots organisations to support and expand new forms of programmatic activity and innovation during COVID-19.

3. Ensure prevention, protection and care service provision during crisis response and recovery.

- Prioritise gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health related services as “essential services”, including those accessed by girls at risk or survivors of female genital mutilation or cutting, to allow service providers to continue operating during emergencies.
- Harness learning from previous humanitarian crises, including outbreaks by working with medical professionals to identify opportunities to disrupt the medicalisation of FGM/C.
- Strengthen social protection measures, such as universal healthcare and universal basic income.

4. Challenge and change the existing harmful gender norms and power imbalances

Similar to Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, the disproportionate impact of climate and health emergencies on women and girls and increase in FGM/C cases during emergencies, are rooted in deeply entrenched harmful gender norms and power imbalances.

- Invest into nation-wide initiatives that challenge and change harmful gender norms that reinforce discrimination and entrench inequality.
- Integrate fully-costed gender transformative initiatives within FGM/C strategies and plans, that address the underlying structures that sustain cutting.
- Advance gender equality at every level by adopting multilevel approach to programming that reaches beyond the target groups to mobilise wider community, target societal structures and policies and institutions.

5. Fulfil the commitments under the international frameworks, including: Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SDGs), International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and Beijing Declaration and Programme for Action.

We welcome the Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality 2021–2026 launched at the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) in Paris. We are particularly pleased to see the Action Coalition leaders’ Collective Commitment on “Accelerating Global Action to End Harmful Practices Against Women and Girls in all their diversity”. We call on the Action Coalition Leaders and UN Women to establish a transparent, third-party monitored accountability mechanism to track implementation of programmatic and financial commitments by all actors. We also call on Member States to make ambitious commitments and implement existing commitments made at the GEF.