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## Commission on the Status of Women

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### **Statement submitted by Women’s Intercultural Network, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Agenda 2030 puts gender equality at the core of sustainable and inclusive development. Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities. (UNFPA) Gender must be main-streamed. Sustainable Development Goal 5 recognized gender equality as a fundamental right in itself, and instrumentally valuable as a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Despite this recognition, equality remains elusive.

The brunt of the dual crises of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the economic “she-cession” has been shouldered by women, with effects exacerbated along existing racial, social, and economic lines. These crises intersect with the climate crises to create a trifecta of vulnerability for the most marginalized. It’s the world’s poorest and those in vulnerable situations, especially women and girls, who bear the brunt of environmental, economic and social impacts. Women and girls face greater health and safety risks, as water and sanitation systems become compromised and in situations of scarcity, they take on increased domestic and care work.

Through their experiences as early adopters of holistic and regenerative agricultural techniques, first responders in crises, entrepreneurs of green energy and decision-makers at home, women offer valuable insights and solutions into better managing the climate’s changes and its risks. Despite this, their collective and individual lived experience and leadership is often overlooked and undervalued. Building a sustainable future entails harnessing the knowledge, skills and leadership of women in climate action. Because women sit precariously at the intersection of many daunting social problems including poverty, climate change, and violence, it is critical that they be safe and empowered to reach their full potential. Gender-mainstreaming will accelerate progress across all SDG’s. It’s no wonder then that women’s leadership is explicitly called for in the preamble to the Paris Accord.

Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programs is an urgent multilateral and multi-stakeholder endeavor.

UN Women has identified important priorities:

1. Enhancing understanding and expertise by all stakeholders on gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender perspective in the thematic areas under the Convention, Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Accord.
2. Enhancing disaggregate data collection and knowledge of the application of gender-responsive tools and methodologies to realize gender-responsive implementation of decisions.

Women’s Intercultural Network proposes the following recommendations:

1. Member states must honor existing climate commitments and implement new strategies and policies to enhance results, including stronger engagement with the private sector, indigenous peoples and civil society, with increased focus on gender equality.
2. Mitigation and adaptation strategies must center a Climate Justice Human Rights framework to ensure policies, programs, and initiatives are equitable for women and girls, and all marginalized groups. The climate crisis is a transformational moment in history that holds the opportunity to transform not only the energy sector, but discriminatory structures of governance, and unsustainable economic models.

Integrated sustainable projects and programs that advance social, economic and environmental solutions must be prioritized.

3. The creation of a UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change is needed to increase accountability for women's and human rights abuses linked to climate change and to guide governments on addressing climate change from a human rights perspective.

4. Climate Change Education must become mandatory curriculum at all levels, including the development and implementation of educational and public awareness programs on climate change and its gendered effects. Curricular guidelines provide a solid framework for facilitating and financing development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of gender-inclusive Climate Change Education. (S. Aibe, K. Gross 2021)

5. Girls' participation in local, national and international climate fora by creating guidelines for youth engagement in climate decision-making processes. Publicize the critical and intersectional roles that women and girls play in accelerating climate adaptation and resilience activities in families and communities, and the expertise they bring from their daily lives. (S. Aibe, K. Gross 2021)

6. Climate solutions must center both indigenous and women's leadership. Their role in decision-making, protection and management of resources is crucial. Women and girls face disproportionate risk of food scarcity, water availability, violence and climate and conflict induced migration. Policies must be informed by, and responsive to, their needs. Indigenous communities steward 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity. Conservation initiatives and the protection of carbon sinks are vital to mitigate climate change and avert its worst effects. Ample evidence shows protecting forest-dependent communities, the rights of Indigenous peoples' tenure, ensuring women's participation in local forest governance delivers major benefits for climate. Furthermore, in cases where women have been fully in-volved in local forest governance that delivers both livelihood and conservation benefits, forest regeneration and canopy growth improved. (Human Rights Watch)

7. Best practices in just climate-responsive legislations and strategies should be replicated.

a. Illinois offers a prime example of transformative legislation at the state level. The groundbreaking Climate and Equitable Jobs Act is legislation which will bring lessons learned to states across the country that are poised to make an equitable transition from fossil fuels to clean energy. The Climate and Equitable Jobs Act marks one of the nation's greatest advancements in climate justice and workforce transition, creating integrated solutions that advance equity and climate objectives.

b. Women's Intercultural Network encourages states, non-governmental and the public and private sectors to fund and apply the gender-focused evaluation, practices, and metrics outlined in CEDAW to bring this global framework to local communities to advance women and girls' equity and accelerate progress across all SDG's. The sustainable cities initiative of UN Habitat and the work to realize SDG 11 have spurred policies, programs, partnerships, and initiatives to address local risk and resiliency. Gender mainstreaming is imperative to ensure this work is inclusive, equitable, effective and sustainable. Women's Intercultural Network has been connecting CEDAW to local action. Since its launch in 2014, the Cities for CEDAW Campaign has identified vital links between human rights, gender equity, and local public policy. As Resolutions and Ordinances have taken shape in numerous localities across the United States, it is clear that advocates, both men and women, see their communities as

responsive, organic and committed to the well-being and empowerment of women and girls and families. To date, under the aegis of Women's Intercultural Network and partners, 10 cities have enacted ordinances that incorporate anti-discrimination human rights standards and strategies into local governance, modeled by language of the UN CEDAW Treaty.

These ordinances demonstrate the growing consensus that CEDAW is a roadmap to gender equity, inclusion, and sustainability at the grassroots level. In addition to US municipal ordinances, there are currently 10 county governmental bodies that have adopted the CEDAW model to identify inequities. The Cities for CEDAW Campaign mandates a Gender Analysis to study and address discriminatory policies and practices. These analyses provide localized disaggregate data points on employment, social services, access and participation. The resulting data informs strategic plans and policy decisions. Adopting a local CEDAW framework provides oversight and creates the measurement mechanisms essential to track progress. Oversight bodies like Gender Equity Commissions and Task Forces have been instrumental in addressing equitable inclusive decision-making, pay equity, work-related imbalances, safety, and violence against women.

Climate risk is a vulnerability multiplier. Because CEDAW cities are more equitable, they are inherently more resilient. Closing the gender gap builds individual and community resilience.

The CEDAW framework is instrumental in advancing the BPfA. It provides local governments, in partnership with civil society organizations and the private sector, the tools to build a sustainable infrastructure for gender equality. CEDAW establishes that climate justice and sexual and reproductive health rights are interlinked in the human rights and empowerment framework.

8. Climate Investments must match the scale and urgency of the problem. Prioritizing women in clean energy investments, access to capital, job training, hiring, ownership, and new business creation is important in closing the gender gap and a necessary step to "building back better." These mitigation investments must include retrofitting buildings to increase energy efficiency; adopting renewable energy sources like solar, wind; helping cities develop more sustainable transport: bus rapid transit, electric vehicles, and promoting more sustainable uses of land and forests. Programs and policies that protect Coastal Wetlands, promote Agroforestry and regenerative farming, decentralize clean energy distribution and fund integrated solutions that address adaptation and mitigation will pro-mote resiliency.

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