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Statement submitted by Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, 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

The first of the United Nation's 2030 Sustainable Development Goal is to end poverty, "in all its forms, everywhere." However, this goal appears to be in jeopardy. A 2023 United Nations Special Report stated that in 2020 the number of people living in extreme poverty, currently defined as living on less than \$2.15 a day, rose to 724 million, reversing a three-year trend of poverty reduction. If this trend continues, the report predicts that 575 million people will still be living in extreme poverty by 2030, a far cry from the original goal of zero (UNDESA, 2023).

Of those 575 million people, over 340 million or about 60 per cent, will be female (UNDESA, 2023). According to Oxfam International, women are more likely than men to live in poverty for several reasons: (1) engaging in low paid work, earning on average 24 per cent less than men, (2) engaging in the informal economy with a lack of protections, and (3) engaging in unpaid care work, ranging from 2-10x as much as men, estimated at a value of \$10.8 trillion (Oxfam International, 2023). Interlocking systems of oppression mean that women also experience increased poverty and gender disparities through their intersectional identities including age, disability identity, ethnic identity, Indigenous identity, race, and sexual identity (Alvarez & Evans, 2021).

Furthermore, climate change compounds the existing disparities of marginalized communities and individuals (Levy et al., 2023). The increase in the frequency and intensity of worldwide weather disasters including droughts, floods, extreme storms, heatwaves, typhoons, and wildfires disproportionately affect women and girls who, for many of the same reasons, are more likely to live in poverty (McCarthy, 2020; UNDESA, 2023). "80 percent of those displaced by climate related disasters and changes around the world are women and girls" (UN, 2021, November 9). A 21-year longitudinal study found that climate disasters lowered the life expectancy of women more than men, and that this effect was moderated by women's socioeconomic status (Neumayer & Plumper, 2008).

While climate change creates pressures on everyone, resilience to these pressures is intricately connected to local and macro level political and economic processes, adding new layers to already existing patterns of vulnerability (Sugden et al., 2014). In the context of agrarian communities from Eastern Odisha and the Gangetic Plains of Nepal and India, for instance, male out-migration leaves women more vulnerable to extreme climate change events (Patel, 2019; Sugden et al., 2014), sometimes forcing their migration as well given the scarcity of natural resources (UN, 2023). A recent qualitative study done in Pakistan echoes this (Arshad et al., 2022). As often the main caregivers, women are usually left behind after a disaster to care for children and older adults while men might leave to find work. This leaves them the burden of finding food and water, which climate disasters can make almost impossible (Arshad et al., 2022). A study examining the outcome of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico showed much the same. Because they were the carers of the household, women shouldered more of the burden of survival: collecting rainwater, bathing children, cooking, cleaning, and all with very limited resources (Oxfam, 2023).

Besides acute disaster events, chronic weather events like droughts or freezes affect women's stability as well. Climate change will make the gathering of wood and water, frequently a female role, extra difficult, and thus reduce the time they have for other potentially paid opportunities (Escalante & Maisonnave, 2022; McCarthy, 2020). Often women do not own the land they are working on, and thus cannot make any long-term decisions, nor are they eligible for any possible assistance in times of strife (Arshad, et al., 2022; McCarthy, 2020). Additionally, women are often paid in crops rather than money, leaving them dependent on men in the household for non-food

goods such as medicine or clothes (Arshad et al., 2022). As another example, women in Afghanistan carry the biggest burdens of climate change related to harms in their country, with higher rates of poverty compounded with restrictions on their rights to education, participation in decision-making, protection from domestic abuse, and work. Moreover, difficult for Afghan women face difficulties accessing the food supply, which is already short supply from drought-related crop losses, contributing to higher rates of malnutrition amongst Afghan women (UNICEF, 2023).

Climate-change related hazards are particularly dangerous for pregnant women. Extreme heat is linked to preterm birth, low birth weight, and even miscarriage (Baharav et al., 2023). A cross-sectional study conducted in Ghana found that the risk of miscarriage rose by 12 per cent to 15 per cent with every 1.8°F (1°C) increase in wet bulb global temperature (Asamoah et al., 2018).

Additionally, incidences of interpersonal violence increase after climate disasters due to increased anger, stress, and hopelessness (Arshad et al., 2022; UN Environment, 2019; Wenden, 2011). Since climate change limits access to natural resources, such as fish, some women are sexually exploited in order to gain access to either a food or income source (McCathy, 2020). Climate change is also increasing the rates of child marriage and human trafficking, as families struggle to afford to feed their children (UN Environment, 2019).

When families are displaced due to climate disasters, refugee girls are half as likely to have the opportunity to continue their education (McCathy, 2020). And when families can only afford to educate one child because the land has been less productive, they choose the male child (Arshad et al., 2022). Girls are often taken out of school during droughts to help support the family, and when schools are damaged during disasters, families are reluctant to send their daughters to temporary facilities due to fear of violence on the commute (Harris, 2022). The lack of education makes the girls vulnerable and perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

Poverty, discrimination, climate change, and violence are taking a collective toll on the mental health of women and girls who are facing unprecedented levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Clayton et al., 2021; WHO, 2022). Additionally, women are at higher risk to suffer from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder after environmental disasters (Baird & Svarverud, 2022; Xiong et al., 2016).

All in all, it is clear that the world is struggling with a women's rights crisis. Empowering women around the world addresses not only their own risk factors but has cascading positive effects for the world. A systematic review of 17 international studies found that the presence of women in conservation roles resulted in significantly better outcomes across a range of indicators (Leisher et al., 2016). Multiple successful environmental projects have been led by women, and over 60 per cent of the winners of the Goldman Environmental Prize have been women. Indigenous women especially have been on the front lines; as examples: Waorani Indigenous leader Nemonte Nenquimo stopped the sale of seven million acres of Indigenous land in the Amazon to oil companies by suing the Ecuadorian government, and LaDonna Brave Bull Allard of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe led the protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline, leading to its eventual demise (Scheuman, 2023). Countries with higher female political participation have stricter climate change policies, fewer carbon dioxide emissions, and lower carbon footprints (Kwauk, 2019). Countries with higher levels of gender equality overall have stronger environmental policies (Harris, 2022). Thus, by empowering women globally we not only lift them out of poverty, but we can also make a substantial impact on climate change.

Urgent, increased attention to preventing and remedying human rights violations toward women and girls is needed in all areas of life: education, health and

wellbeing, freedom, self-determination, political and economic participation, and reproductive rights. We recommend the following actions:

- Accelerate financial investments in meeting gender equality SDG targets.
 - Across all parts of society, increase the visibility, voices, and vantage points of girls and women.
 - Scale up efforts to address reproductive rights and gender-based violence.
 - Redouble efforts to prevent child marriage and sex trafficking through greater enforcement of human rights laws.
 - Address the educational disparities faced by girls worldwide by increasing access to schools and adequate, gender-neutral infrastructure.
 - Ensure that girls and women receive an education that addresses issues they face such as poverty, climate change, and health and reproductive rights.
 - Scale up efforts to address the mental health needs of women and girls by greatly increasing the number of service providers and mental health centres.
 - Ramp up efforts to ensure that women and girls voices are heard and valued and that they are included in leadership on local and macro levels.
 - Remove barriers to girls and women having full political and economic participation rights and enforce accountability and transparency on all governing bodies.
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