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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Graduate Women International (GWI), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The climate crisis is rapidly affecting humankind, particularly women and girls, on an unparalleled level creating an immediate need for innovative ideas. For positive change, Graduate Women International (GWI) insists on the equal participation of women and girls in all levels of the decision-making and the access to education. The year 2019 left 165 million people in need of aid¹ due to varying crises and disasters. Negotiators in the 2019 global climate talks in Madrid failed to achieve their primary goal of writing protocols to advance Article 6 of the Paris Agreement Conference of Parties (COP) 21. This critical task of setting each country's steps to reach national climate targets is now carried forward to COP 26 planned for November 2020 in Glasgow, Scotland.²

For the people most affected by the climate crisis, time is critical, and action is needed. As an organisation committed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, education for all, and to empower all women and girls through the safe access to quality education, GWI 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 positive difference. 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 and girls are 70% of the world's poor rendering them uniquely vulnerable to the climate crisis.³ They are highly dependent on natural resources, less educated, and less involved in political and household decision-making processes.⁴ Additionally, some norms are rooted in a gendered socio-cultural ethos that discourages them from learning climate adaptation skills, learning for sustainable development and lifesaving emergency skills such as swimming and drought adaptation that limit their options in disaster situations.⁵

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

1 McWeigh Karen, Downward spiral of war, crisis and need to worsen in 2020, fears top UN official, 21 December 2019, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/dec/21/downward-spiral-of-war-crisis-and-need-to-worsen-in-2020-fears-top-un-official>

2 The Conversation, Madrid Conference Real Failure, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/the-madrid-climate-conferences-real-failure-was-not-getting-a-broad-deal-on-global-carbon-markets-129001>

3 International Labour Organisation (ILO), Facts on Women at Work, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_067595.pdf

4 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Overview of linkages between gender and climate change, 2016

5 United Nations Development Programme, gender, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, 2016, https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/Gender%20and%20Environment/Training%20Modules/Gender_Climate_Change_Training%20Module%202%20Adaptation%20DRR.pdf

Consequently, as an organisation comprised of 52 national affiliates, many in developing countries where the climate crisis severely impacts millions of women and girls, GWI and those with whom we collaborate, are calling for immediate action towards climate justice, the building of climate-resilient societies and the reduction of environmental inequality.

Persisting cultural biases such as restricted land rights, lack of access to education and training, technology and financial resources reduce women's equal inclusion in the decision-making processes related to climate justice⁶. GWI notes that women show more concern for the environment⁷ and that they also predominate in the world food production (50 to 80%), but paradoxically they own less than 20% of the land. Inexcusably only 23% of parliament members are women⁸, and this underrepresentation in political roles limits their influence on decisions taken to alleviate the climate crisis.

GWI acknowledges recently improved political and societal will to incorporate gender perspectives into climate crisis policy. However, the organisation remains concerned about persisting gender-based barriers in all sectors of society that reduce the possibility of successful climate action. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2013 found that "a nation's competitiveness depends on whether and how it educates and utilises its female talent" and whether they have "the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as men". GWI underscores that educated women are agents of change who can break the cycle of poverty and lead their communities towards sustainable development. GWI, consequently, calls for their inclusion as critical leaders who are vital for successful climate crisis change.

Given the opportunity, women will help reverse the climate crisis and contribute to sustainable resource management at the household and community levels, notably rural and indigenous women who possess a unique understanding of adaption to changing environmental circumstances. Research shows that including women in projects like solar energy, reforestation and sustainable waste management, not only results in favourable climate impact but also brings us closer to achieving gender equality called for in SDG 5.9 By becoming agents of climate action, these women realise better living conditions and improved health and their relevance in society as leaders increases. Yet, without proper education, the potential of women and girls as champions of climate resilience and sustainable development remains mostly untapped.

As an organisation committed to the empowerment of all women and girls, GWI contributes to the elimination of systemic barriers and inequalities faced by women and girls through lifelong education. An example of the organisation's commitment to lifelong education GWI's 2018 Bina Roy Partners for Development Programme project provided more than 50 rural Kenyan women and girls with a holistic programme of livelihood skills training, opportunities for income generation, and support for girls' education. In less than a year, this programme led to a measurable increase in girls' school enrolment, reducing their vulnerability to the climate crisis in the project's target community.

Climate and environmental crises are grounds for global prudence. GWI warns that, unless priority and commitment towards girls' education are given, States risk falling short of their obligations to achieve the SDGs by 2030 thus, shamefully, rendering null all efforts towards climate crisis targets. Considering the urgent need to put women and girls at the forefront of sustainable development and climate agenda and policies, GWI appeals to the 43rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to urge Member States to:

- Provide safe access to quality education and lifelong training to 100% of women and girls worldwide.
- Educate women on climate-related issues and provide them with training on climate action; including incorporating gender considerations in climate technologies.
- Increase women's political participation at the local, national and international level by at least 50% in areas most vulnerable to the climate crisis.
- Include gender considerations in financing climate action supporting local projects developed and run by women's organisations.
- Engage and foster women's meaningful participation at all levels of the decision-making process concerning climate action.

⁶ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2018, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf.

⁷ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Report on the implementation of the OECD Gender Recommendations, 2017, <http://www.oecd.org/mcm-2018/documents/C-MIN-2017-7-EN.pdf>

⁸ World Bank, Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>

⁹ Women Gender Constituency /Women Engage for a Common Future, Solution Genre et Climat, 2018, <http://www.wecf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018-Gender-Just-Climate-Solutions-French.pdf>

- Adopt a gender mainstreaming strategy for climate action.
- Improve women's equal participation and remuneration in the labour force to facilitate their impact on the climate crisis.
- Connect with and engage the enthusiasm and alarm of today's young people as agents of change for the climate crisis and allow them to participate in the discussion.

GWFI, its 52 country affiliates and co-sponsors of this statement, are committed to this course of action and welcome collaboration.

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 February 2020]

Graduate Women International: Climate Crisis Action Requires Equal Participation in Decision-Making by all Women and Girls

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