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

Joint written statement* submitted by Graduate Women International (GWI), Canadian Federation of University Women, Federación Mexicana de Universitarias, Women Graduates - USA, Inc., non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

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

[19 August 2021]

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

Decision-makers must recognise that education, and funding it, are the most valuable weapons to tackle the climate crisis

While we are witnessing the burning of many parts of our planet, and as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to slow down international climate decision-making, the need to commit effectively to the Paris Agreement and to act in a fair and inclusive manner for the environment has never been more crucial. As plenty of evidence show that climate change adversely affects the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, and impacts differently women and girls in particular [1], time is critical and action is needed to act for them to protect their most essential rights. Education, which is both a basic human right and a right necessary to achieve other human rights [2], continues to be under severe threat as we move further into the climate crisis and as decision-makers fail to recognise that this is the most valuable weapon to addressing it.

We, members of the civil society, have been sounding the alarm bell for a long time about the necessity to take concrete action to protect the environment, as well as to acknowledge that environmental justice is intrinsically linked to gender equality and access to education. As an organisation committed to 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, Graduate Women International (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.

Due to economic factors, social construction, persisting gender discrimination and harmful gender norms, women and girls have been continually marginalised from all spheres of society and denied their basic rights to education. With 11 million girls who will not return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic [3], there is still more evidence showing 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, while constituting a burden for them. All this increases the risk of child marriage, violence, dependence and poverty. Since women and girls constitute 70% of the world's poor, which render them uniquely vulnerable to the climate crisis [4], we must urgently put an end to this vicious cycle.

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 calls member states to redouble their efforts to keep girls in the education system and to duly fulfil their obligation related to the protection of the rights guaranteed under the CEDAW Convention in the context of climate change, in particular the right to education and information [5]. Indeed, by ensuring women and girls' education you make them less vulnerable to the climate crisis and contribute to their perception as a resource, needed for recovery and response efforts.

Because it's only a short step from being a victim to being a change-maker. Historically, women have always been at the forefront of environmental protection. On one hand, correlations were found showing that women in positions of political authority leads to lower carbon footprints, and when there is a great number of women in parliament, there is a higher ratification of environmental treaties [6]. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that in the American civil society, women are more concerned and aware about climate change and its emergency than men [7], even if they represent less than a third of students enrolled in studies preparing for future green jobs worldwide [8]. For all this, GWI encourages governments to invest in women's education as they are powerful actors of climate action, which will ultimately strengthen community adaptation to climate change and how to respond to it.

As expressed in several of our Resolutions [9] (in particular 2007/10 and 2010/7), GWI is tirelessly committed to prove that educating women and girls is the best long-term investment States can make, because it is our best tool to transform our societies in the most fair and sustainable way. But education is more than just States' prerogative: it is a global compact, and everyone can contribute to protect this resource, in their own way. For example, we, as a civil society organisation, provided through a 2018 Bina Roy Partners for Development Programme project 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 Henceforth, considering the urgent need to put women and girls at the forefront of sustainable development and climate agenda and policies, GWI appeals to the 48th 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 the number of women in climate decision-making processes.
- Adopt a gender mainstreaming strategy for climate action.

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