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Statement submitted by Canadian Federation of University Women, Federación Mexicana de Universitarias, Federation of American Women’s Clubs Overseas (FAWCO), Graduate Women International (GWI), International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Latter-day Saint Charities, Make Mothers Matter, National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, Soroptimist International, Widows Rights International, Women Graduates-USA, Inc., Women’s Federation for World Peace International, and Zonta International, 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

Graduate Women International (GWI) and its statement cosponsors call on Member States to fund and prioritize women's and girls' education so that they are empowered to speak climate truth and justice to power.

As the world experiences rising temperatures and unprecedented disaster-related crises, climate change has never been so alarming and addressing the consequences more critical. Climate change has already resulted in environmental degradation and apocalyptic disasters that have taken the lives of tens of thousands of people. Furthermore, according to the United Nations Development Programme multiple, evidence-based sources indicate that climate change adversely affects the world population's most vulnerable and marginalised groups and impacts differently women and girls in particular. Women and girls are at 14 times greater risk of death from climate-related disasters.

Climate change, degraded environments and ensuing disasters, combined with economic factors, social structures, persistent discrimination, and harmful gender norms, continually put women and girls at a much higher risk for diminished health, poverty, food and water insecurity, violence, trafficking, and loss of rights particularly to education.

Time is critical and action is required to protect their essential rights. Their right to education which is both a basic human right and a right necessary to achieve other human rights (source: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Twenty-first Session) is under severe threat as societies move further into the climate crisis and as decision-makers fail to recognise that widespread inclusive, equal, and quality women's education is one of the most effective weapons to combat it.

Members of civil society have been sounding the alarm for decades about the need to take concrete action to protect against the consequences of climate change. They have repeatedly emphasized the need to include women's perspectives in policy and decision-making at the local, national, and international levels, but these perspectives have largely been ignored.

GWI, committed to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and especially, SDG 4, education for all, and to the empowerment of all women and girls through safe access to quality education, emphatically posits that women's perspectives must be included and that there is an intrinsic link between women's education and political participation. Studies have shown that the higher the level of women's formal education, the more their tendency to participate in policy development in general.

It is equally important to include impoverished women engaged in subsistence farming as it is to involve women who may not be as economically challenged. When women farmers, who are arguably the first victims of climate change and natural disasters and the forerunners of climate adaptation are engaged, climate change mitigation programs and policies can be built on their experiences in crop resilience planning, innovation in scarce resource management and environmental conservation.

However, GWI cannot emphasize enough that the key to building these capacities is education for poor women and girls. For these women and girls, education has the power to not only empower their participation in climate programs and policies, but to unleash their innate knowledge and capacities in the accomplishment of SDG 13, "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts".

Similarly, involving educated women in general, harnesses their core academic competencies, expertise, critical problem-solving and decision-making skills to climate change mitigation policies and programs. For instance, existing correlations show that having 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 (source: UNFCCC, Differentiated impacts of climate change on women and men; the integration of gender considerations in climate policies, plans and actions; and progress in enhancing gender balance in national climate delegations, 2019). It has been demonstrated that among American students, women are more concerned and aware about climate change and its urgency than men, even if they represent less than a third of students enrolled in studies preparing for future green jobs worldwide (source: Generation Equality Forum, Feminist Action For Climate Justice – Action Coalition – Visual, 2021).

Women, regardless of economic or social background, are usually first to adapt, are first responders to natural disasters, leaders in disaster risk-reduction, and contribute to post-disaster recovery by addressing the early needs of their families and strengthening community building.

When women, in general, are invited to participate in policy development, to share their practical experiences and knowledge in climate adaptation, analytical abilities, skills and innovative ideas, crucial capacities are built into all SDGs.

GWI encourages governments to invest in women's education, as they are powerful drivers of climate action, who will ultimately strengthen community response and adaptation to climate change and to building much needed capacities into policies and programs. GWI reminds Member States that education remains the most powerful foundation to develop capacities. Eleven million girls will not return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic (source: UNESCO COVID-19 education response: how many students are at risk of not returning to school? Advocacy paper, 30 July 2020) and more evidence exists showing that both education and girls are too often the first to be sacrificed in times of crisis. Since women and girls constitute 70 per cent of the world's poor, rendering them uniquely vulnerable to the climate crisis (source: International Labour Organisation Facts on Women at Work) years of progress and effort towards gender equality in education must not be reversed but reinforced with the provision of inclusive and equal systems of education together with tools that will facilitate girls' and women's skills and power to act against climate change.

As an organization comprised of 52 international affiliates, many in developing countries where the climate crisis severely impacts millions of women and girls, GWI calls member states to fulfil their obligation related to the protection of the rights guaranteed under the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women, in particular General Recommendation No. 37 on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change (source: CEDAW General Recommendation 37). Indeed, ensuring women's and girls' education reduces their vulnerability to the climate crisis and contributes to their perception as a resource that is needed for response and capacity building efforts.

SDG 13: Climate Action is more than just States' responsibility: it is a global compact that must meaningfully include women who comprise half the world's population without which inclusion, the world stands to lose its most valuable resources in the achievement of all SDGs and will fall short of the 2030 Agenda.

GWI warns that, unless women's practical knowledge and experiences, abilities to analyse and solve problems and make recommendations are built into all climate change mitigation efforts, climate change is on track to accelerate exponentially within a mere five years.

Therefore, GWI appeals to the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women to urge Member States to:

- Understand the gendered dimensions of climate change and all efforts at recovery from and reduction of change.
 - Support and encourage traditionally excluded populations of women and girls to share their success at climate adaptation and then replicate these models.
 - Fund and prioritize women's and girls' access to education and retention up to the highest levels of learning, so that they may be empowered to speak climate truth and justice to power.
 - Include women in all programs and policy development
 - Include all women and their innate expertise, academic learning, analytical and critical skills to build much-needed capacities into the accomplishment of SDG 13 as also a means to achieve SDG 4.
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