

**Priority theme:** Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes;

In addressing the Priority Theme of the Sixty-Sixth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we, the UK Civil Society Women's Alliance, and sister organisations, reiterate and affirm the need highlighted by the Secretary-General in the Key Proposals from the Common Agenda; all States Parties must place women and girls at the centre of their agendas.<sup>1</sup>

Climate change remains the most significant global threat to human life. It is well established that women and girls currently suffer the worst impacts. More extreme and less predictable weather, growing food insecurity, increasing water insecurity, and unstable living conditions all combine with gender inequality to leave women more vulnerable. Catastrophic damage to homes, educational facilities, communities, and livelihoods mean that women and girls – already left furthest behind – face reducing opportunities to achieve their potential.

We support the call for women and girls to be placed at the centre of agendas, and draw attention to the United Nations' own findings that "in many societies, socio-cultural norms and childcare responsibilities prevent women from migrating or seeking refuge in other places or working when a disaster hits. Such a situation is likely to put more burden on women, such as travelling longer to get drinking water and wood for fuel. Women, in many developing countries suffer gender inequalities with respect to human rights, political and economic status, land ownership, housing conditions, exposure to violence, education and health. Climate change will be an added stressor that will aggravate women's vulnerability."<sup>2</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the vulnerable position of women and girls globally. There has been an increase in violence against women and girls, exacerbating all existing barriers between women and girls and their opportunities for equality and advancement.

States must take responsibility for actions affecting the environment undertaken within their jurisdictions. Individual actions to mitigate climate change are important, should be encouraged, and should be recognised. However, a major report released in 2017 attributed 70% of the world's <sup>3</sup> greenhouse gas emissions over the previous two decades to just 100 fossil fuel producers. An <sup>4</sup> update in 2020 outlined the top 20 fossil fuel firms behind a third of emissions. A recent international study from the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom calculated that, across 86 countries, the richest 10% of people consume around 20 times more energy than the poorest 10%. A major portion of this heightened consumption by richer people is through transport, the study found: flights, holidays and big cars driven long distances. It is clear that we need structural change and a global adjustment with governments and major companies being held to their commitments beyond cosmetic labelling and token gestures.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/#download>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/womenin-shadow-climate-change>

<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.cdp.net/en/articles/media/new-report-shows-just-100-companies-are-source-of-over-70-of-emissions>

<sup>4</sup>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/09/revealed-20-firms-third-carbon-emissions>

Food insecurity is a particular concern given the current reality of climate change and related disaster. Women predominate in the world's food production (50-80 per cent), but they own less than 10 per cent of the land. It was recognised at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, over 25 years ago, that a lack of access to land titles; credit and finance; access to technology and irrigation were serious impediments for rural women. Water insecurity remains a fundamental threat to the lives of millions of women and girls globally – a fact brought to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reality is that even when resources are in place to facilitate participation, access is often limited by prejudicial laws, practices, and/or attitudes which prevent widows, indigenous women and girls, disabled women, and other individuals from having equitable opportunity. All actions moving forward must be taken within the context of a human rights-based framework for women and girls, irrelevant of their geographic location, marital status, age or ethnicity.

Climate change can increase the risks of violent conflict, create risks to human security, and challenge conflict recovery and peacebuilding. The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda framework has the potential to improve action in promoting women's participation in addressing climate-related security risks. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015) links the relevance of climate change to the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and notes the impacts of climate change. National Action Plans can promote an integrated approach to addressing the intersection of climate change, related security risks and gender equality. Women who are given equal and meaningful participation in security sector institutions can effectively contribute to long lasting peace and sustainable development and address the challenges climate change brings.

We recall the Commission's previous commitment "that the full and equal representation of women and men at all levels of decision-making in executive, legislative and judicial branches of government and the public sector and in all spheres of life is needed to promote peaceful, just, inclusive and sustainable societies. It notes that women's participation and leadership are needed in the formulation and implementation of government policies and regulations in order to reflect women's and girls' specific needs. It recognizes that temporary special measures and increased political will are needed to accelerate the pace towards achieving gender balance at all levels of government."<sup>5</sup> We respectfully ask when this will be acted upon?

We call for a proportionate gender balance at the top of our international processes, including the Conferences of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and recognition that all negotiations towards peace and security, climate, and human rights, need an equal balance of women in their construction. Women must be involved centrally and equally in discussion and action, and devising action, to address them. At the same time, the evidence available confirms the need noted in other areas for disaggregated data collection, so that the implications and realities of the impact and potential impact of climate change can be factored in effectively to government policy and practice.

Further echoing the Secretary-General's commitments, we support the call for Civil Society Focal Points in United Nations entities. These Focal Points must create a meaningful and genuine platform for collaboration and the building and strengthening of partnerships. Civil Society Organisations have vast, detailed, and expert knowledge, grown from lived experience, research, and commitment to positive change. They are thus a vital resource essential to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

### **Recommendations**

Climate change, disasters, and crises reveal and compound existing inequalities, including gender inequality. We therefore recommend:

- That a gender-transformative approach is used across environmental, sustainability, and disaster risk reduction programmes in order to best support sustainable development, recovery and future resilience.
- Recognising and drawing on the expertise of indigenous and rural women who know their local environments best.
- Increasing efforts to partner with local Civil Society Organisations who have the on-the-ground knowledge of environmental and social needs. They frequently hold a position of trust within communities, making them best placed to enact sensitive projects and to work from the grassroots up.
- Improving living conditions and access to sustainable technologies to ensure people can take action to preserve their environment.
- Prioritise access to, and participation in, political processes for women, including national and international mechanisms. Where necessary, this should include the use of quotas and special measures to ensure equal representation of women.
- In light of increased potential for climate related conflict, include within National Action Plans the call for women's equal participation and employment in policing and other security sector organisations, to help maintain a peaceful society and address the potential of conflict due to climate change.
- Improving resources to build community resilience and improve sustainable infrastructure. ● Expanding and enhancing economic opportunities for women and girls through well-planned programmes that respond to community needs. An environmental dimension should be built into economic programmes.
- Elaborating on and enforcing laws to protect women working in informal sectors. All International Labour Organization member states should ratify ILO C-190 as part of their gender equality efforts.
- Urgently making safe water and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities universally available, particularly in rural areas. International support must be increased to facilitate local action in order to achieve this in an environmentally sustainable way. Governments should incentivise environmentally friendly behaviour, but also to introduce effective penalties for practices that are proven to harm ecosystems and threaten our collective future.
- The human rights outcomes of sustainable development programmes should be used for monitoring and evaluation. Progress measured by both qualitative and quantitative measures for human rights must be used as a marker of success for programmes.
- Continuing to develop capacities for disaggregated data collection, interpretation and analysis, including the creation of new qualitative indicators. Understanding the quality of sustainable development activities is vital to assessing whether gender equality will be achieved.
- Implement gender budgeting in all aspects of Member State's policies.

SecurityWomen  
Widows for Peace through Democracy  
Widows Rights International  
Wales Assembly of Women

Mothers' Union  
National Board of Catholic Women  
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform  
National Alliance of Women's Organizations  
Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland  
Associated Country Women of the World