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Statement submitted by Women in Europe for a Common Future, 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

Women and environment: Chapter K of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia Region)

Climate change, environmental and chemical pollution, and degradation have already increased inequalities in the Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia region. Snow caps are melting in Central Asia, leaving rural agricultural communities exposed to landslides and increased insecurity of income. In the Balkan and Black Sea region, flooding has demolished homes and led to disability and death, particularly among women and elderly who were not able to evacuate timely. A Canadian study showed that women working in the plastic industry have a five times higher risk of developing breast cancer during their lives. In some countries, women make up 85 per cent or more of the pesticide applicators on commercial farms and plantations, often working whilst pregnant or breastfeeding. They are highly exposed to pesticides.

Patriarchal structures represent a structural barrier that stops women from taking action and makes them even more vulnerable to climate change and the impacts from hazardous chemicals. For example, in Central Asia, many men in the rural communities have migrated to work abroad, but the women who stay behind are often not able to make decisions regarding the use of the land since legally, the decision-making power is limited to their husbands.

The increasing number of health effects, such as breast cancer, reproductive diseases, and diabetes, are linked, among others, to chemical exposure. Exposure to toxic chemicals damages not just women's physical, mental, and reproductive health, but also determines their status in society. Women suffering from, for example, reproductive damages due to chemical exposure, are often subject to domestic violence, mental abuse, and social exclusion.

Strategic objective K.1: Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels

The call under strategic objective K.1. is far from being met. Recent statistics from European Union countries show that national governments include less than 30 per cent of women and that women hold less than 20 per cent of the seats in some national parliaments (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). Women from rural communities in the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia region have little or no decision-making power, and negative impacts of new constructions of hydropower plants or coal-fired power in the Central Asian, Western Balkans, and Black Sea regions are not taken into consideration. Women and girls feel disempowered by investment decisions that impact their lives, but are taken without public consultation nor gender perspective.

Therefore, we call for:

- Funding that supports inclusive participation of feminist civil society and community groups that know how to ensure gender-just climate and environmental and chemicals policies, to ensure active engagement of all women in decision-making on climate, sustainable development, and gender.
- The commitment of governments to adopt a second gender action plan under the Paris Agreement, including progressive targets to reach gender parity in all main decision-making bodies and negotiation delegations on climate, as well as gender-transformative national climate measures. In particular, they should commit to gender-just climate technologies.

Strategic objective K.2: Integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development

Environmental and climate policies have mostly been entirely gender blind. It is at the international level in particular that targets for gender equality were set and that gender-responsive planning and budgeting was ensured. The United Nations Framework for Climate Change has a gender action plan that started two years ago and sets targets for women in decision-making as well as for the allocation of means for climate action. A number of countries have taken measures to institutionalize gender equality in their environmental ministries and agencies, by setting targets or allocating budgets to gender-responsive research. In the Eastern European, Balkan, and Central Asian region, several countries want to integrate gender dimensions in their climate funding applications, as this has become a requirement from the Green Climate Fund. However, when it comes to budget allocation, gender-responsive measures are too often seen as an add-on, especially at the national level, and not yet seen as a primary area of intervention. Too often, the need for changing underlying gender-discriminatory roles and behaviours is addressed with reluctance and gender mainstreaming as a concept has not been introduced.

We therefore call for:

- Governments at national and local level to divest from fossil fuel-related activities and invest in sustainable, renewable, local sectors that have committed to gender equality, as well as end all discrimination against women in all their diversity (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women). In the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region, that includes divesting from coal and nuclear power, as well as a moratorium on hydropower plants. The European Union and United Nations should provide audits and legal support for countries in the region to exit contracts in these fossil fuel-related areas.
- Support the creation and replication of local climate-positive economic and social sectors with gender equality and women's leadership in all sectors – food, energy, transport, building, and communication – by establishing and enabling conditions and by eliminating unfair support to unsustainable sectors, including high taxes on aviation, shipping, private vehicles, and more.
- A gender approach and perspective in terms of better protection from hazardous chemicals that have shown to have different physiological impacts depending on the sex of the person. Women are specifically vulnerable due to biological dispositions and social roles, not only as being the first environment for their children. The volume of chemicals production will double by 2030, including chemicals of concern.

Strategic objective K.3: Strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional, and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women

Monitoring and evaluation as well as the measurement of impact in general is more and more on the agenda. The gender impact assessments of gender action plans at the European Union level as well as national levels provide an important insight on the gender performance and highlights gaps and challenges. However, the lack of a consistent gender impact analysis before the adoption of a law, programme, or policy is still outstanding. The Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda contain a long list of indicators, of which not even a third is gender-sensitive.

We therefore call for:

- The need to build capacity of civil servants and decision makers on how to plan and budget for gender-responsive climate and environmental actions and how to develop gender-transformative indicators. In the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region, countries should set targets in line with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) gender marker, to ensure that all climate and environmental funding is gender-transformative.
- Obligatory gender impact assessments of laws, policies, and programmes.
- The need to collect gender-disaggregated data to understand different vulnerabilities based on biology, occupations, and gendered practices.
- The development of gender-transformative indicators to measure the impact of laws, policies, and programmes.
- The integration of a gender focus on existing funding schemes and the allocation of specific funds for projects on sustainable development and gender.
