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peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Girls’ Power Initiative (GPI), International Relations Students’ Association of McGill University, Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc, Youth Foundation of Bangladesh, Youth Path Organisation, and Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), 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

As youth, we will inherit the successes, challenges, and failures of today's global leaders. As we mark the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University joins Girls' Power Initiative, the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc, the Youth Foundation of Bangladesh, the Youth Path Organisation, Young Power in Social Action and other youth-led and youth-centred organizations in calling for the full and meaningful participation of young women and girls in environmental decision-making and sustainable development.

We possess unique perspectives on how the climate crisis, the marginalization of women and girls in decision-making and gender-based violence affect youth, and all our intersecting identities, in distinct ways. In developing policy responses to these pressing issues, effective approaches must consider how young women, girls and Two-Spirit (2S) LGBTI+ youth, particularly those with racialized identities, disabilities and marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, are uniquely positioned. This intersectional approach ensures that no one is left behind and that policy responses are effectively meeting the needs of all youth. To this end, we highlight three Critical Areas of Concern in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as issues with limited progress for youth and provide corresponding calls to action to address the marginalization of young women and girls in environmental decision-making.

Gender Inequalities in Natural Resource Management and Environmental Safeguarding

While young women are celebrated as adapters and mitigators of the economic and social disruption caused by the climate crisis, they are also relegated to managing the effects of environmental mismanagement rather than given a meaningful role in environmental decision-making to begin with. Even in extraction-based industries where women are the primary producers, governments continue to act negligently while women are discharged by industrial producers from the management of their own resources. This is especially true for Indigenous women and girls facing the consequences of deforestation and commercialization.

While it is often acknowledged that women are disproportionately impacted by climate change, the global agenda on the climate crisis has enacted little policy that acknowledges how the livelihood prospects, access to education and safety of young women and girls are particularly affected by the loss of agricultural productivity and destruction of property due to issues such as soil erosion, desertification, drought and the increased occurrence of natural disasters.

To expand the meaningful participation of young girls and women in environmental decision-making, we call on governments to develop and expand community consultation for economic development proposals with serious attention to the recommendations of young women and girls on the effects and risks of proposed projects. We also call for the equitable distribution of institutional, national and local budgets to foster young women-led innovations that promote the use of sustainable energy and land-use as well as the adoption of climate-resilient agricultural techniques.

Inequalities and Inadequacies in Access to Healthcare and other Essential Services

It is well established that factors such as gender identity, compounded by socioeconomic status, age, marital status, race and other marginalized identities, have

significant impacts on access to health care, economic opportunities and education. Yet, governments and institutions have failed to collect statistical data and do meaningful analysis around the implications of climate change on young women's access to healthcare and related services. This type of research and monitoring is essential to understanding how the barriers faced by young women, girls and 2SLGBTI+ individuals are exacerbated by climate change and ensuring global and national agendas on climate change are well-informed. As such, we call on governments and institutions to fund and facilitate research into the implications of climate change, especially on young women and girls as well as 2SLGBTI+ youth.

Insufficient Mechanisms at All Levels to Promote the Advancement of Women

While many institutional mechanisms have been established at each level to promote the advancement and empowerment of women, they often fail to engage with the needs of young women and girls as well as 2SLGBTI+ youth. This leaves them inadequate in creating, regulating and enforcing policies that promote the advancement of women, especially in spaces of environmental decision-making.

In the context of COVID-19, discriminatory gender norms, social exclusion and resource constraints compound the adverse effects of the pandemic on the lives of youth, girls and women, particularly those with racialized identities, disabilities and marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds.

To mitigate the threats to progress made in gender equality and social inclusion the pandemic poses, we call on governments to enact legal and socio-economic policies to ensure young women, girls and 2SLGBTI+ youth have the institutional support to secure safe employment in decision-making roles. These policies must encompass healthcare - including access to sexual and reproductive care, paid sick leave and comprehensive coverage that includes women with disabilities.

Considering women across the world perform three times more of the unpaid domestic work as men, workplaces must also provide remote, safe and flexible work options to facilitate the participation of young women, girls and 2SLGBTI+ youth who are also primary care providers in decision-making roles. It is vital that these policies specifically address how intersectional identities such as age, marital status, disability and sexual orientation impact access to safe working conditions to ensure that the meaningful participation of all women is facilitated in the workplace.

While many governments and institutions have established specialized bodies focused on the empowerment and advancement of women, a funding gap often exists between such bodies and other governmental agencies working on other issues. In cases where such specialized agencies have been established, we call on governments and institutions to provide funding and support that is proportionate to all other agencies comparable in impact and scope. More specifically, as youth-led organizations, we recommend that agencies focusing on the empowerment and advancement of women are not made peripheral to other activities but are integrated into an oversight role to provide education, monitoring and recommendations on the use of gender-based analysis in all governmental and institutional programming. This is especially important for specialized bodies advancing programming in land-use, infrastructure development, agriculture as well as resource development.

COVID-19 has posed significant challenges to the capacity of governments to reach the most vulnerable groups and communities. Amid these challenges, many young people have demonstrated initiative and mobilized their local networks to meet the needs of their communities in innovative ways. To this support this, we call for greater coordination between governments and youth-led initiatives as well as expanded support for community organizations with grassroots experience in program implementation.

Ultimately, we are haunted by the urgency of the climate crisis and are frustrated with the current global response that has failed to address the distinct implications of the climate crisis on young women and girls. This includes, but is not limited to, the increased prevalence of natural disasters that leads to the displacement of young women and girls, sharp declines in access to clean water, sanitation and adequate healthcare, as well as significant disruptions in the quality and consistency of education. For many islands, especially islands in the Pacific region, climate change is now an escalating crisis and not merely a threat.

We need immediate and decisive action to prevent future global disasters caused by climate change that will disproportionately impact young women and girls. Importantly, this action must include gender-responsive approaches to policy development and acknowledge that the empowerment of youth women and girls is essential to building resilience and meaningfully addressing the drivers of climate change.

Young women and girls are at the forefront of climate advocacy as the lead organizers of grassroots initiatives, community activists fighting for climate justice, and drawing attention to inequity in global governance. As youth-led and youth-centred organizations, we join them in calling on governments and institutions to address the outlined calls to action to guarantee the meaningful participation of young women and girls in environmental decision-making, climate-smart policymaking, as well as sustainable development.
