



## Economic and Social Council

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

**Sixty-sixth session**

14–25 March 2022

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to  
the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by CLAN (Caring & Living as Neighbours) Incorporated, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Caring & Living as Neighbours supports the sixty-sixth session on the Commission on the Status on Women and its mission to improve gender equity as outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. Caring & Living as Neighbours would like to acknowledge the Wallumedegal peoples of the Eora Nation, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are headquartered. Caring & Living as Neighbours also acknowledges the Lenape people, on which the United Nations is headquartered in New York City, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

Caring & Living as Neighbours is an Australian non-governmental organization founded in 2004 with the mission to maximise quality of life for children living with non-communicable diseases and other chronic health conditions in poor resource settings. Caring & Living as Neighbours also occupies the role of Secretariat of Indigenous NCDs, a movement that seeks to promote the voices and experiences of Indigenous peoples within the global non-communicable disease discourse.

Caring & Living as Neighbours operates under a rights-based strategic framework for action that promotes a community development approach to redressing inequities experienced by children living with chronic health conditions in resource-poor countries. Caring & Living as Neighbours' model seeks to focus multisectoral collaborative efforts on five pillars considered essential to achieving the highest possible quality of life for the non-communicable disease communities we partner with. The five pillars focus action on:

- Access to medicines and equipment
- Access to education, research and advocacy
- Optimisation of medical management
- Encouragement of family support groups
- Actions to reduce financial burdens and promote financial independence

The World Health Organization describes climate change as the greatest threat to human health. The most visible impacts of climate change, such as floods, droughts and increased wildfires and hurricanes, have already devastated and displaced communities around the world. The immediate loss of life from the catastrophic effects of environmental disasters is already too large, but the increasing impacts on the environment will lead to long lasting consequences that need to be addressed immediately for a chance at survival. Climate change affects the crucial biodiversity in the environment and decreases land accessibility as well as food and medicinal sources for some communities. The physical environmental changes, such as air pollution and fluctuating weather patterns can lead to an increase in non-communicable diseases, and droughts have already reduced the natural resources available, increasing the instances of malnutrition, a major contributor to non-communicable diseases.

According to the 2009 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, poorer countries with a large gender gap are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Indigenous People make up about 5 per cent of the global population but make up 15 per cent of the world's extreme poor communities. Moreover, the socio-economic gap between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous counterparts is increasing, with the gender gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Women being even wider. Indigenous People, in particular Indigenous Women and Girls, will be disproportionately affected by climate change, and this will further compound the

impact of increasing non-communicable disease prevalence in Indigenous communities.

Caring & Living as Neighbours is committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the 4th Conference on Women in Beijing. We aim to address the effects of non-communicable diseases on the poorest communities through strategic action guided by our five pillars to promote health. We acknowledge community engagement and control as imperative to success. Likewise, we believe Indigenous People, specifically Indigenous Women, provide a much-needed view on climate change action and protection of natural resources. Their input must guide future mitigation and adaptation strategies and primary areas of concern in 2022 are detailed below:

1. As paragraph 246 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action states, climate change, resource depletion, environmental pollution and poverty lead to increases in non-communicable diseases, such as cancer and immune deficiencies. Compounding this, women have unequal access to basic health resources and inequitable opportunities for the promotion and maintenance of their own health as stated in paragraph 90 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Evidence of the connection between climate change and human health – notably non-communicable diseases – is strengthening. Climate change is now associated with diabetes, heart attacks, strokes, kidney diseases, mental health conditions and many more conditions. In this regard, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action highlights the importance of Caring & Living as Neighbours' first pillar, promoting affordable access to essential medication and equipment. Without necessary treatments and supplies, non-communicable diseases will result in ever increasing preventable disability and death.

The links between poverty and climate change are likewise key. Financial burdens exacerbate climate-linked health conditions, and this is exacerbated when essential medicines are not manufactured locally at an affordable price. Caring & Living as Neighbours' fifth pillar, reducing poverty and promoting financial independence, employs solutions such as awarding promoting school attendance, increasing local access to quality healthcare, and facilitation of global supply chains to optimise pricing of pharmaceutical products. Reducing financial barriers for families and communities increases their ability to implement sustainable practices which help combat climate change.

2. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action paragraph 256 details the involvement of Indigenous Women in environmental decision-making and integration of gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programs for sustainable development. Climate change affects every community yet marginalized groups suffer most from lack of participation and involvement in mitigation strategies.

This goal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action aligns with Caring & Living as Neighbours' second pillar to raise the voices of youth and families we work with to the ears of health professionals, policy makers, and the broader national and international communities. Indigenous Communities likewise have a key role to play in promoting advocacy and efforts to reduce the impact of climate change. Involvement of Indigenous People in environmental decision-making processes is imperative. Indigenous Peoples' invaluable knowledge of the land can inform observed changes so we can all better understand what needs to be done to mitigate the effects of climate change. Indigenous People have been able to identify and adapt to the changing environment quickly and efficiently, something the rest of the world has been slower to achieve. Promoting Indigenous People's voices and integrating Indigenous perspectives within solutions will impact positively on environmental health for all.

## Conclusion

Women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable to the destructive effects of non-communicable disease, climate change, environmental disasters, poverty and disadvantage, and yet they must be acknowledged as primary stakeholders given their roles as caregivers and tenants of land. Caring & Living as Neighbours especially underscore the vital role of Indigenous women as leaders who are best placed to guide global efforts with their unique knowledge of the relationship humans have with the land on which we sit.

Caring & Living as Neighbours calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and other relevant United Nations entities to:

- acknowledge women as mothers and primary caregivers of children living with non-communicable diseases. Women must be empowered as active partners in all efforts to drive change and Caring & Living as Neighbours advocates for recognition of their invaluable contributions maintaining the health and wellbeing of children – particularly those living in the most vulnerable circumstances.
- recognize the enormous potential of the World Health Organization’s plan to establish a Youth Council and the vital importance of ensuring it is as inclusive as possible. Indigenous Youth must be engaging with the global non-communicable disease and climate change discourses. Although Indigenous Peoples make up only five percent of the global population, they account for about fifteen percent of the extreme poor and will inevitably experience continued adversity and health challenges as climate change worsens. An inclusive Youth Council will likewise ensure young people living with non-communicable diseases in resource poor settings are heard – especially those severely threatened by climate change. Resourcing must support those for whom English is not their primary language to engage in order to redress systematic exclusion of many young people from meaningful discourse.

Caring & Living as Neighbours reaffirms its commitment to eliminate gender inequality in accordance with the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We believe women serve as vital agents of change and recognise the indispensable need for women’s empowerment in order to accelerate the UN Sustainable Development Goals and champion the values of UN Women.

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