



## Economic and Social Council

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

**Sixty-sixth session**

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**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 Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, 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

The Commission of Churches in International Affairs of the World Council of Churches brings forward our fellowship of 349 member churches representing more than 500 million Christians worldwide to address the 67th Commission on the Status of Women. The 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, is crucial to the commitments and social justice work of our member churches in all regions of the world. Within the Fellowship, and with our ecumenical partners, the World Council of Churches (WCC) remains committed to addressing the current climate emergency, to securing a just response to climate change and for emphasizing the need to include women and girls in our outworking of climate justice.

The God of the Bible is a God of justice who protects, loves, and cares for the most vulnerable. In our time humanity has an impact on the global ecosystem and what we do now decides the future. We are not only care takers, but we all depend on Mother Earth's health. To care for our neighbour, is also to care for all Creation. This is at the centre of World Council of Churches (WCC) work on climate justice.

There is now broad recognition that the effects of climate change are unevenly distributed among countries, genders, and social classes. These are already more severely impacting women than men, because of gendered norms. Food, water, health, and energy are particularly affected by climate change, form the base of women's livelihoods, and fall within the purview of women's responsibilities. Women are often in charge of growing and preparing food, gathering firewood for fuel, collecting water, and caring for the sick in their families – tasks, which become more gruelling and time-consuming with the intensification of floods and droughts. Women's economic insecurity increases more than men's in the aftermath of natural disasters. They also recover more slowly than men from economic losses due to damage to property and loss of livelihood. Moreover, women's, lack of land rights and control over resources, particularly indigenous women's, when exacerbated by their restricted access to information, education, credit, and technologies – translate to fewer means to deal with climate change.

Women tend to contribute less than men to Green House Gas (GHG) emissions. In the developing world, they are often engaged in labour-intensive, low-emission subsistence agriculture while men are mainly responsible for the cultivation of capital-intensive, high-emission cash crops. While women have a good understanding of the causes and consequences of climate change and have the knowledge and skills to mitigate, adapt and build resilience to it, they are consistently underrepresented in policy and decision making around climate change at local, national, and global levels.

Political institutions at every level are rapidly losing the confidence of citizens who perceive them as corrupt and out of touch; and their decision-making role is increasingly subordinated to the demands of global business empires whose accountability is measured only in terms of the profits they earn. But the moral foundations of human community have in the meantime become even more fragile, with women and children most adversely affected. The growing awareness of threats to the earth's ecology is not matched by a will to make radical changes in lifestyles and forms of production.

Over the years, the WCC helped foster a movement for climate justice, impacting millions of people around the world. Since the 1970s, the WCC has helped develop the concept of sustainable communities. The WCC has been present and actively engaged at all UN climate change conferences since the United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted in 1992. By engaging in continuous dialogue and programmatic cooperation with such agencies as the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNFCCC UN Environment and UN Women; we aim to strengthen and enhance UN discourse and practice on issues of peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. Through these dynamic partnerships, the Ecumenical Office at the UN serves to echo the call to action of the ecumenical fellowship, promoting peace building, reconciliation, human rights, peaceful resistance to violence, and sustainable development.

We call your attention to the Framework Convention focus on ethical principles as The Principle of Intergenerational Equity that declares, "the Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind." Through childbearing, women have a distinctive connection that is created with infants and children, especially in their formative years. Inclusion of women's voices in decision-making is essential to the protection and preservation of the climate. Let us be remembered by our children and our children's children as decision makers who responsibly addressed climate change, one of the major challenges that humanity has ever faced, and avoided a major calamity for the Earth and humanity. Let us be reminded that our generation is probably the very last generation having within our immediate power to limit global warming to 1.5 and not over 2°C; for future generations won't have this freedom of choice. It requires further and more sustainable programs and processes to reverse the current climate conditions and improve on the legacy we leave to them.

The Paris agreement from 2015 is the framework that now is tested when the parties must come with higher ambitions to mitigate the emissions, deliver finance and develop the Warsaw mechanism to a Loss and Damage instrument. If the world should avoid major and serious problem caused by climate change the UNFCCC and COP 26 must deliver more ambitious targets that go in line with the science presented in the 6th assessment from Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Both the 4th & 6th assessment reports of IPCC reiterate that "Climate and freshwater systems are interconnected in complex ways. Any change in one of these systems induces a change in the other. Climate change affects freshwater quantity and quality with respect to both mean states and variability. It also predicts with a much higher confidence that "a warmer climate will intensify very wet and very dry weather and climate events and seasons, with implications for flooding or drought. Thus almost 1/3rd of world's population (about 2.1 billion people) who currently do not get access to safely managed drinking water is only going to swell due to climate change. As articulated above women form a sizeable population of these numbers.

We are receiving formidable messages from nature, indigenous people and the most vulnerable telling us to wake up and make the transition to a more ethical society based on justice, equity, and sustainability without dilution. Life is the most precious gift given to human beings. Life is beautiful, and the beauty of the natural world cannot be compared to anything created by human genius. But what is human life if it cannot be lived in full dignity? How would our future be if there were no safe drinking water, clean breathable air, green forests, and blue oceans to absorb and purify the atmosphere from polluting carbon dioxide? We fully know what causes climate change and we know how to at least ameliorate the damage. We must have ambitious goals, while at the same time manage its consequences for as long as it takes to minimize the threat and realize safety for the earth and all its inhabitants.

The World Council of Churches believes that the whole Earth community deserves to benefit from the bounties of creation. Faith communities are addressing

climate change because it is a spiritual and ethical issue of justice, equity, solidarity, sufficiency, and sustainability. When creation is threatened, churches and Christians are called to speak out and act as an expression of their commitment to life, justice, and love. The entire globe is in a serious climate emergency.

The present world development model is threatening the lives and livelihoods of many. Equitable development for all is possible while maintaining the ecological integrity of the biosphere. Justice and peace are needed: we must not remain unmoved to the pain, to the loneliness, to the injustice, and to the effects of the war against nature, without having done the utmost to save innocent people around our beautiful world from the consequences of our present indifference to the future. This is what we, people of faith, people of firm convictions, are asking of the 66th Commission on the Status of Women.

**Recommendations:**

- Tackle the roots of the climate emergency by radically cutting national GHG emissions, according to science and Paris Agreement objectives with wealthy and historically polluting nations taking the lead, and eliminating subsidies for the fossil fuel industry;
- Ramp up transfer of finance from wealthy, polluting nations to low-income and vulnerable countries for mitigation and adaptation, and ensure that such finance is accessible to grassroots, rural and indigenous women;
- Invest in sustainable alternatives and climate solutions that foster poverty eradication and gender equity such as community-based renewable energy systems, sustainable agriculture, fishery and forestry, among others;
- Ensure that climate mitigation, adaptation, resilience-building, disaster risk reduction and migration policies respond to women's priorities and needs, e.g. livelihoods, food sovereignty, access to water, health, not least by enabling women's representation and participation in climate change policy-making processes;
- Address social, economic, and racial factors related to climate displacement and disaster response, especially for women's access to safe and dignified water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and encourage provision of WASH resources in rural communities to reduce the risks of sexual and gender-based violence;
- Listen to the voices of young people and children, not least young women and girls while formulating and implementing climate policies, as their future is at stake and they are our hope for a sustainable future.