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peace for the twenty-first century”

**Statement submitted by Canadian Labour Congress,
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Association, International Service for Human Rights, Italian
Association for Women in Development, OutRight Action
International, Stichting CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality,
and Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and
Transgender Rights – RFSL, 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

The Commission on the Status of Women's 66th Session priority theme provides an opportunity for the international community to commit to ensuring fuller inclusion of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming women, girls and people in the consultation, design, and development of strategies to tackle the climate crisis.

We must recognize that lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming women, girls and people, continue to be among those most vulnerable and disproportionately affected by climate change, including through exclusion, violence, discrimination, and barriers to accessing programs which respond to, and prevent climate disasters. Therefore, all strategies addressing the climate crisis must be gender just, human rights framed and transformative, to promote gender equality as outlined in the Beijing Declaration, must "leave no one behind", and tackle the structural causes of inequality and marginalization affecting all women and girls.

Lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming women, girls and people experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, oppression, violence, stigma, inequality and harmful social and cultural norms, increasing their risks and vulnerabilities in the climate and ecological crisis. This includes discrimination in access to health, education and social services, safe and adequate housing, decent work and sustainable livelihoods, safe spaces and opportunities for community building, and other basic human rights. The criminalization and medicalization of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming women, girls and peoples' identities and their barriers in accessing identity documents that accurately reflect one's gender identity exacerbate these issues.

We call attention to environmental defenders as one of the most diverse groups of activists, and the most targeted by States and corporations. We express our concerns about the threats to life, freedom and integrity that they face while defending their communities and the planet. As the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders accounted, women environmental human rights defenders are more likely to face gender-specific violence, with sexual violence being used against them to silence their activism and advocacy.

Similarly, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming women, girls and people who are also environmental defenders are at risk of exclusion, and of being the subject of harassment and violence not only on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics but also due to their work. Because of this, any strategy or call for action to protect environmental defenders should also recognise the intersecting vulnerabilities of this diverse group of activists.

Climate Change

It is evident that marginalized groups, including lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming women, girls and people are most impacted in times of crisis. These impacts will only increase as the consequences of climate change enhance existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, making it essential that marginalized groups be centered in all efforts taken to tackle climate change. The United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs argues that populations who are excluded from economic progress will be unevenly affected by climate change, as they live in infrastructures that are not prepared for climate shocks.

Already, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming women, girls and people are vulnerable to higher rates of homelessness because of rejection from their families and lack of community and societal networks; they have lower education levels due to harassment, bullying, lack of support from families and discriminatory educational systems; difficulties securing safe and proper housing, water and sanitation because of poverty, economic barriers or blatant discrimination from landlords and State social service infrastructure; they have less access to the formal job market because of discriminatory attitudes from employers; they lack land tenure due to discrimination from landholding systems; and their health outcomes are worse compared to the rest of the population.

In such precarious conditions, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming women, girls and people are and will experience heightened challenges when facing climate disasters. If homeless, they will endure extreme heat waves and record low temperatures, putting their lives at risk. If they are living in poorly equipped housing, outages of electricity and water caused by extreme climate worsen their living conditions and threaten lives. Extreme climate loss and damage and other disasters may cause institutions that provide essential services for sexual and reproductive health to shut down, preventing them from accessing lifesaving services, commodities and medicines to prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections, chronic illnesses, gender reaffirming therapy, or mental health services.

Moreover, lesbian bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming people face discrimination in emergency shelters and in accessing services after a natural or climate-related disaster, including higher rates of violence and being excluded and denied emergency and financial assistance. In humanitarian relief efforts, same sex couples and their families may not receive relief support if they are not recognized as legitimate couples and families by the government, and transgender and intersex persons face high barriers in accessing services due to mismatched identity documents. Continued stigma and discrimination also deter many from seeking State and non-state assistance for fear of ostracization or harassment. Strong legislation, strategies, policies, and programs must address these specific realities and vulnerabilities to ensure the lives of and well-being of these populations are protected and addressed.

As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has recognized, refugees and internally displaced persons are at the frontlines of the climate emergency. Furthermore, climate change creates new refugees and migrants. It is essential that governments rethink humanitarian and immigration policies and ensure all peoples' right to migration without discrimination, violence, or fear of reprisal. Lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming women, girls and people must be able to exercise their right to migration and to seek refugee status; they must be granted human rights protections as workers regardless of their chosen form of labour, including decent wages, safe working conditions and access to health services. It is also important to ensure that human rights defenders protecting these populations are also guaranteed protection from harassment and violence, to prevent gender-based violence silencing their advocacy.

The precedent of COVID-19

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and heightened structural barriers faced by lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming women, girls, and people, increasing exclusion and systemic vulnerability to climate change. Data gathered during the pandemic shows they are experiencing increased levels of intrafamily abuse, leading to homelessness and greater economic vulnerability; strains put on healthcare and social services due to COVID-19 have reduced their access to lifesaving medical services; their levels of

unemployment and poverty have increased; and isolation and exclusion from relief efforts have negatively impacted their mental health, raising suicide rates among youth.

Furthermore, governments have failed to include lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming women, girls and people in defining COVID-19 protection measures and responses, resulting in a lack of access to safe and identity-affirming community spaces and relief efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic proves that gender-just and transformative policies and strategies must be implemented to mitigate devastating outcomes for marginalized groups that will be hit the hardest as a result of the current climate emergency.

Conclusion

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda call for an intersectional approach that puts an end to violence, discrimination, and the exclusion of any individual or group in order for climate, disaster and humanitarian response to reach the most vulnerable in our societies. All climate response must address and combat the marginalization of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming women, girls and people. A better world for everybody in the face of climate change is only possible through universal inclusion and human rights. Without an explicit commitment to pushing back against exclusion, economic and social insecurity, and efforts to include lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming women, girls and people in climate and disaster response, the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the promise of the 2030 Development Agenda to “leave no one behind” will never be realized. Gender justice is a precondition for the realisation of Sustainable Development and Climate Justice.
