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peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by Insamlingsstiftelsen Kvinna till Kvinna, 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  
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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **How to Advance Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa Region to Leverage Action for Environmental Sustainability and Tackle Climate Change?**

The Middle East and North Africa is home to fragile, conflict-affected contexts. In such contexts, combined with scarcity of natural resources, the provision of essential services, such as water, are critical to mitigate the burden of climate change, instability and conflict. This is particularly the case for women, who are more vulnerable to climate-fragility risks, given their different gender roles and responsibilities.

Estimates indicate that by 2030 more than 132 million people will fall into extreme poverty due to climate change (World Bank, 2020). People need resources to respond to the effects of climate change, poverty contributes directly to vulnerability. The actual levels of poverty in the region are high, with two-thirds of the population falling in the categories of poor or vulnerable (Khouri, 2019). The region has the lowest female labour force participation rates across the world, with 18.4 per cent of women participating in the labour market (ILO, 2019). Gendered divisions of labour result in the overrepresentation of women in agricultural and informal sectors, which are more vulnerable to climate-fragility risks. Inequalities in economic opportunities and access to resources render women more vulnerable to climate change because they have fewer assets and resources, they are often poorer and are not involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Across the region, women have limited voice in political decision making. The average regional proportion of female members of parliament, 19 per cent, is well below the global average. Many governments include only one or two female ministers, typically confined to portfolios on women's traditional roles (ESCWA, 2017). Stereotyping women's representation in parliament and ministerial positions constitutes a barrier to their involvement in climate responses. Internationally, the region has one of the lowest rates (32 per cent) of female participation at environmental conventions (IUCN, 2017).

Women continue to face gender-based discrimination in the region. While progress since 2005 is steady, some legal frameworks (e.g., personal status law, inheritance) and institutions continue to reinforce women's subordination, promote gender stereotypes, and discrimination (UNWOMEN, 2018). Lack of such critical assets renders women vulnerable to climate-fragility risks.

Gender roles and social status at all levels increase women vulnerability to climate-fragility risks and limit their capacity to respond. Cultural and religious norms limit women's abilities to make decisions in disaster situations and, in some cases, hampers their mobility in emergencies.

Gender-based violence continues to devastate lives of women across region. Evidence shows that it is used as a form of socio-economic control giving men unfair advantage for ownership, access, use of natural resources (IUCN, 2020). The potential for violence related to natural resources is augmented in the face of environmental stressors and threats. These conditions create situations where control over scarce or degraded resources is fraught, resulting in higher tension and increased negative coping strategies (e.g., child marriage).

Lack of and access to data on the impact of climate change are challenges in the region. Expanding data and evidence-generation, particularly around the differences

in gender roles, impacts of climate change and disasters, is imperative to inform gendered climate change, environmental and disaster risks policies and programmes.

Recognizing the water-energy-food nexus is extremely important. Today, Middle East and North Africa region is one of the world's most water-scarce regions globally. The decrease of freshwater resources is observed in the most parts the region due to the increase of demand for energy (Siddiqi, et al, 2011). Energy is needed for producing, transporting and distributing the food and also for extracting, collecting, transporting and treating the water (Flammini et al, 2017). Less water availability also affects agricultural production. Research shows that by 2030, food security will be affected by more frequent, longer, and more intense heat extremes and droughts (WFP, 2015). These effects are inherently gendered and should be further studied and mitigated.

Institutional structures with a mandate to address climate change in the region are currently limited to one ministry per country. These must be integrated across all relevant ministries such as environment, finance, agriculture (UNDP, 2018). Strengthening institutional capacities to address climate change and adopting a multisectoral approach are needed to facilitate the integration of climate change in development plans, budgets and policies.

The motives, capacity, and enabling environment are important variables that impact civil society participation in climate change advocacy. There is limited space for citizens to debate climate and environment issues in the region and governments can interpret environmental activism as a threat which needs to be repressed. Not one country in the region has an open state for civic engagement (CIVICUS, 2021). Most civil society organisations lack the technical knowledge and capacity to incorporate climate action into their civic space and the majority of them are occupied with priorities such as fighting corruption, democratisation and advancing human rights. Climate security and climate justice should be high on the civil and governments agendas as these are human security and social justice issues. Understanding the linkages between climate and social justice and human security remains poor in the region.

Climate change contribute to migration and conflict acting as a threat multiplier to human security in the region. Peacebuilding and sustaining peace are increasingly difficult because climate change directly affects the dynamics of ongoing conflicts and increases the likelihood of conflict. One example is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinian Authority has little control over its natural resources, land, or economy. Israel controls more than 80 per cent of the water from the West Bank's aquifers (European Parliament, 2016); in Gaza, 20 per cent of arable land in the highly dense and urban environment is off-limits for agriculture due to its location in the "buffer zone". Food insecurity currently affects 40 per cent of Palestinians in the West Bank and 60 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza (WFP, 2021) and is likely to increase as Palestinian agriculture requires water. As stagnation in political negotiations continues, the realities of climate change continue.

Gender equality and inclusion of women must shape future development, climate actions and disaster risks reduction policies. Creating policies to advance gender equality and women's empowerment and addressing gendered aspects of climate change are priorities to leverage the gender-environment nexus for environmental sustainability. Gender equality and women's empowerment can contribute to reduce the negative impacts of climate change on women and ensure their role in protecting the environment.

Kvinna till Kvinna calls upon all Member States in the Middle East and North Africa region to:

- Recognize the nexus between gender and climate change in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through national action plans and policies.
- Integrate intersectional gender analysis and mainstreaming into climate change, environmental and disaster risks mitigation adaption plan to prepare for the impacts of climate change on women in the region. Incorporating women into consultation and planning ensures more effective, intersectional and just plans.
- Establish water, energy and food linkages through integrated and efficient management and adopt and implement intersectional adaptation and mitigation strategies which will not be possible without inclusive civic participation and the quality of the economy (producing equitable and sustainable full employment).
- Expand data and evidence-generation, particularly around the gendered impacts of climate changes and disasters in relation to gender roles, peace and security, imperative to the development of climate change, environmental and disaster risks initiatives.
- Develop policies and programmes to address existing and new risk factors for gender-based violence, within the context of disaster risk reduction and climate change.
- Support peace making efforts to become climate sensitive. Linking climate adaptation to human security and peacebuilding will increase resilience to climate-fragility risks. Ensure women's participation in peace making processes and responses to climate change, are inclusive and responsive to the needs, capacities, and vulnerabilities of all.
- Support gender parity in employment policies and practices and end discriminatory employment practices. Economic empowerment programs should incorporate environmental aspects and be inclusive.
- Address the shrinking space by supporting civil society organizations' and women's rights to access to environmental justice while further supporting environmentalist activism and movements to advance climate action and just transitions.
- Support gender equality in land tenure, inheritance rights, and access to resources, from a legal standpoint and via effective implementation and enforcement.
- Support equal representation of women in decision-making bodies, public and private sectors. Meaningful engagement of women is needed in environmental decision-making at all levels, including environmental planning, financing, budgeting, and policy-making at local and international levels.