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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 Mother’s Union, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Mothers' Union is a global, women-led, volunteer Anglican movement with 4 million members in 83 countries, working to create a peaceful and safe environment for all, fight for gender justice and build individuals' self-reliance. We are a non-governmental organization that has been in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2000. We collaborate closely with the Anglican Consultative Council, Faith in Beijing Coalition, and the UK Civil Society Women's Alliance (UKCSWA).

The climate crisis is a major threat to the lives and wellbeing of communities across the globe. Over the years, climate-related disasters have become increasingly frequent and severe. Many of our members are women living in the poorest and most marginalised communities in the world who face higher risks and greater burdens as a result of climate change. These members and their communities have contributed least to the problem, yet are hit hardest by this devastation. Recent examples include droughts (in many parts of Africa such as Sudan and South Sudan), rising water levels and floods (the Small Pacific Island Developing States), forest fires (USA and Australia), or cyclones (West Indies).

At Mothers' Union, our belief is that all people are made in the image of God and should enjoy the same rights. As Christians, in common with most people of faith, we are motivated to care for Creation, as well as for one another. We are therefore compelled to address climate justice, particularly as a matter of gender justice. Our members, both in the Global North and the Global South, can make personal lifestyle changes and advocate for change in the policies and practices of their Governments. We seek to play our part and to call others to play theirs.

We wish to highlight the following priorities and recommendations for Member States, agencies, and funders:

(1) Climate change impacts women and girls disproportionately, revealing and compounding gender inequality. Our grassroots network of members, predominantly women based in rural communities, have been affected in the following ways:

(a) Livelihoods have been severely impacted as the rain-nurtured, small-scale agriculture that mostly women undertake, for example in Madagascar, suffers disproportionately during periods of drought.

(b) UN Women reports that in 80 per cent of water-deprived communities, the gendered division of labour means that women and girls have to walk for miles for water for their families, putting them at risk of violence and forcing girls to withdraw from school, limiting their education (UN Women, SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all).

(c) When food is scarce, women will go without to feed the men in the family.

(d) In natural disasters, for example in Malawi, women are particularly impacted as their caring burden increases greatly.

(e) Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by climate-induced migration, in particular as there is an increased risk of people targeting them with gender-based violence and trafficking.

COVID-19 has further amplified the effects of the climate crisis for women and girls, for example with the 'shadow pandemic' of increased domestic abuse by perpetrators, and greater hunger due to loss of income.

Planning and funding of all climate change initiatives must therefore be gender-sensitive, taking into account women and girls' specific needs and priorities. In responding to climate change, actors must also address the structural, systematic and systemic inequalities that put women at greater risk of the impacts of climate change and work to shift negative gender norms and policies that constrain women's access to and control over resources, particularly land.

(2) Whilst being the most strongly affected by the climate crisis, women are uniquely placed to identify and implement practical and sustainable solutions for the whole community. Women's knowledge and expertise about their needs and the needs of their community, as well as what is required to adjust to the changing environment, are critical to effective climate change strategies for mitigation, disaster reduction and adaption. They must therefore fully participate in relevant policy and decision-making at all levels. Research shows that their participation in decision-making and implementation has led to better outcomes for the environment and the whole community (World Bank (2011), *Gender and climate change: 3 things you should know*). Despite this potential, women's voices and role continue to be overlooked in climate change efforts and decision-making.

At Mothers' Union, we have seen the benefit of women-led solutions in our programmes around the world, where women act as volunteer facilitators in their communities. In this capacity, women participate in policy and decision-making, drawing on their knowledge and expertise to bring about long-term positive change in their local context. For example, in Madagascar, women identified that the planting of Vetiver could both minimise erosion and provide a source of food, and MU led a programme to implement this. Prioritising women's participation in our work has drastically strengthened women's leadership, building the leadership skills of the facilitators themselves, as well as inspiring other women to take up leadership positions for the first time. In 2020, through Mothers' Union's programmes worldwide, 65% of members have reported an increase in women's participation in decision-making in their local Church or Community. Greater commitment from all actors to increasing women's participation in decision and changing making to address climate change is urgently needed.

(3) To be effective, climate change solutions need to be locally-led and sufficiently resourced, including through local faith actors. Greater support, by means of increased climate financing and resource provision, must be given to organisations embedded in local communities most at risk because they are best positioned to provide context-appropriate support before, during and after climate disasters, as well as secure long-term change.

Locally embedded faith-based movements, particularly those which are women-led, like Mothers' Union, have a significant role to play in addressing climate change. Our members are present in some of the most marginalised communities worldwide, including those most at risk of the climate disasters. Moreover, they have influence because faith actors shape people's norms and practice, such as their management of resources, including how land and water are stewarded in times of crisis. Our members are part of their communities and therefore uniquely positioned to support them both before crises occur by helping to find strategies for disaster risk reduction and building resilience, and long after, for example, through trauma healing, as in Malawi, and practical strategies to sustain livelihoods. They know the needs and how to respond, and they are respected and listened to.

Locally led organisations like Mothers' Union have a strong track record of working through members to influence social norms and practices, build resilience and ensure locally appropriate solutions to mitigate disasters. For example, in Toliara, in the diocese in Madagascar, through Mothers' Union, members chose to work

together to dig a pipeline. By the end of the official project the pipeline had not yet reached its intended destination but the community had been given so much hope and encouragement that everyone continued to work without payment and they completed the pipeline that is bringing water to an area that has been devastated by drought for the past 10 years. Having this new irrigation system has allowed the community to grow sweet potatoes for the first time in a decade. This way of working within communities, where community members are enabled to take ownership of solutions, is only possible for organisations, such as those of faith like Mothers' Union, which are themselves embedded in the community.

Recommendations

We call on Member States, agencies, and funders to:

- Ensure that women participate fully alongside men in climate change and disaster risk reduction policy and decision-making at all levels.
- Ensure that the planning and funding of all climate change initiatives are gender-sensitive and take into account the specific needs and priorities of women and girls.
- Address the structural, systematic and systemic inequalities that put women at greater risk of the impacts of climate change, supporting women's leadership and collective actions in doing so, and working to shift negative gender norms and policies that constrain women's access to and control over resources.
- Work with and support organisations embedded in local communities to identify and fund locally practical and sustainable solutions to the climate crisis, including faith-based and women-led organisations, such as Mothers' Union.
- Increase climate financing and resource provision for climate change adaption in marginalised communities most at risk of its impacts to ensure they are sufficiently equipped to respond, supporting locally-led, context-appropriate, gender-sensitive solutions.
