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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 Presbyterian Church (USA), and Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc., 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

We welcome the opportunity to address the 66th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women on achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, and environment and disaster risk reduction policies and programs. The General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (USA) have affirmed our core belief that every person is created in the image of God, deserving of dignity and equal treatment. Presbyterian Church (USA) and Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Inc., in covenantal relationship, have worked for gender equality and equity throughout much of the life of the denomination.

In August 2021, United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, declared “code red for humanity,” describing the effects of greenhouse gas emissions as choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk, affecting every part of the globe, and warning that without action many of the changes were becoming irreversible. Scientific evidence indicates that climate change requires immediate, swift, and effective action to prevent catastrophic events that may lead to mass extinction of creation and risk to humanity’s well-being according to the Sixth Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Our denomination began focusing on climate change in the 1980s. A seminal report, “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice,” was adopted by the 202nd General Assembly (1990). The report called for protection of humankind to grow and thrive without causing damage to the integrity of Creation and defined eco-justice as “the well-being of all humankind on a thriving earth.” In 2008, our General Assembly committed to stand with “the least of these” and advocate for the poor and oppressed in present and future generations who are often the victims of environmental injustice and least able to mitigate the impact of global warming falling disproportionately on them.

A recent report, “Investing in a Green Future: A Vision for a Renewed Creation,” by the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (2020), notes that environmental, economic, and racial justice must be sought to tackle climate change. This aligns with our vision for a Creation renewed, with better health outcomes, living wage jobs, clean air and water, wilderness preserved for its own sake, access to healthy food, and the repair of broken relationships.

Environmental Justice

Climate change impacts women more than men. UN reports show that women represent 80 per cent of people displaced by climate change around the globe. In southern Madagascar, rural women endure severe food insecurity due to prolonged drought conditions and are migrating north to the cities. We are working with our partners to mitigate the effects of climate change such as cultivating drought resistant native seeds and traditional farming practices. In the United States, Presbyterian Hunger Program walks alongside Earth Care Congregations as they turn their commitments to caring for God’s Creation into ministry that rejuvenates, restores, and revitalizes their own community. Other actions include planting trees and taking the Climate Care Challenge.

Environmental Racism

We believe environmental degradation and climate change cannot be addressed without also tackling the underpinning sins of racism, white supremacy, and colonialism. We affirm our belief in the human right to clean water and air as we continue to stand in solidarity with and behind those communities that have

systemically and historically been subjected to pollution and poison in their very homes, schools, workplaces, and recreation spaces. One of our partners has been at the forefront of the women's rights movement within the mining sector in Peru. Over the past twenty years, they have helped lead the movement for environmental health in one of the most contaminated places in the world due to toxic emissions. Thanks in large part to their efforts, the Peruvian legislature recently passed a new law to strengthen prevention, mitigation, and health care for those affected by contamination from heavy metals and other chemical substances.

Economic Justice

Women have less access to economic assets including the right to independent ownership of land, property and earnings, equal pay for work of equal value, access to affordable credit and appropriate technologies. These gender inequities further hinder women's ability to mitigate and adapt to the rapid conditions brought on by climate change. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced even more women into poverty. Women and girls have left school or work to care for family, been forced into child marriage, experienced sexual violence and harassment, and have been displaced from their homes. To encourage economic independence, our partners in Uganda and South Sudan are educating women on their legal rights to land ownership and assisting them in accessing land services and registration, along with providing tools and seeds. These efforts contribute to food security, economic development, and prepare women to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Disaster Risk Reduction Policies and Programs

Natural disasters are more frequent due to climate change in recent years. Communities that were vulnerable and marginalized prior to disaster suffer disproportionately from disaster impact. Our work with these vulnerable communities is carried out by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and includes (1) raising awareness about disaster risks and building community resilience, training Presbyterians in disaster preparation in partnership with Presbyterian Women; (2) awarding national recovery grants to advance mitigation action plans; (3) supporting the work of women-led organizations and co-ops established after disasters as a means of generating income; (4) addressing violence against women and girls by educating, training and supporting local community leaders responding to the state of emergency around increased gender based violence in Puerto Rico, where climate change has contributed to increased violence.

Greater support and better tools and technology are needed to address needs and help communities assess disaster risk. We are committed to empowering women by building climate resilient communities as part of Agenda 2030.

Recommendations

We urge the Member States and the United Nations to:

- Increase ambition to reduce carbon emissions by 50 per cent by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 in accordance with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Paris Agreement.
- Guarantee women's participation in all aspects on climate change programs and policies including designing, developing, and implementing national adaptation programs and climate action plans; provide gender specific data assessments; commit funding for gender and climate finance; develop resource mobilization strategies and deployment of financial resources particularly at local levels for vulnerable communities.

- Recognize faith communities as integral partners in the protection of the earth and promotion of human rights for all people, recognizing that religious communities, institutions, and leaders can contribute to challenging heteropatriarchal attitudes and practices by promoting women's participation at all levels of society.
 - Remove barriers to women's and girls' educational opportunities, particularly in marginalized and vulnerable communities, and promote equitable sharing of authority and responsibilities in family life, work, and society, as well as equal access to economic and political power.
 - Promote equal access to economic assets, including the right to independent ownership of land, property and earnings, equal pay for work of equal value, access to affordable credit and appropriate technologies; promote policies that recognize and redistribute unpaid care work.
 - Challenge programs that prioritize agro-exports and debt-repayments over food sovereignty and recognize the role that women play in achieving food security, particularly food grown by women small-scale farmers, and create access to finance for women farmers.
 - Depoliticize women's and girl's health and provide equal access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.
 - Support and implement policies and laws that guarantee a life free of violence, exploitation, discrimination and fear for all women and girls, and provide full protections against violence and bullying for women and students who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or intersex.
 - Eliminate discrimination and gender biases in local and national laws, policies and customs, and develop national implementation plans to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, with particular reference to Goal 5 and Goal 13 and its climate change impacts on women.
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