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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 Canadian Federation of University Women, 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

Introduction

The Canadian Federation of University Women, established in 1919 and with nearly 7,000 members, envisions a world where women and girls are educated and empowered to make transformative change.

The Canadian Federation of University Women is gravely concerned about the gendered impacts of environmental degradation and climate change. Human activities are contributing to the rapid warming of the planet – the current average global temperature of 1.2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels has already resulted in severe impacts and catastrophic impacts will be felt within one generation if the increase in average global temperature exceeds 1.5 degrees Celsius. Similar to COVID-19, the detrimental implications of climate change will eventually be felt by all, but with disproportionate impacts on the most vulnerable.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s “Code Red” report suggests that the time for comprehensive climate action is now. Unless ambitious climate action plans which focus on deep reductions of greenhouse gas emissions are implemented and transformative changes are made to the way we live our lives, the world will reach unsustainable levels of warming in the next ten to thirty years.

Gender & Climate Change

The climate crisis poses an immediate risk to everything our organization promotes and protects: the rights of women and girls, quality education, health, economic empowerment, feminist leadership, and peace. Women and girls are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change worldwide, experiencing disproportionate risks and burdens. According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2020), in 2018 more than half of the 41 million internally displaced people were women. Their traditional roles as caregivers, farmers, and as primary managers and users of natural resources means their livelihoods are put most at risk by a changing climate.

Women’s unequal participation in decision-making processes and labour markets marginalizes their perspectives in deciding climate action, despite their knowledge and leadership in local sustainable practices and resource management. It is important to recognize the intersections between gender equality, climate action, and other Sustainable Development Goals and the ways in which our efforts to achieve these goals must be synergized and connected. Increased capacity for gender mainstreaming must be developed with investment in measurement, monitoring, and evaluation tools that are inclusive of those most at risk. There must be significantly more women in leadership roles in international bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change or World Energy Council and national energy and environment ministries.

The Canadian Federation of University Women embraces the recommendation from CARE International that organizations representing women and girls and promoting gender equality must play an influential role in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies and plans relevant to climate and displacement. Women and youth activists can be critical agents of change when included in leadership roles in every step of climate change programs, the adoption of renewable energy technologies, and climate-smart agricultural practices.

Although women and girls are disproportionate victims of climate change, they are also dynamic changemakers in climate action. The Canadian Federation of University Women believes that gender-sensitive approaches, women’s participation,

and Indigenous-led environmental stewardship are essential to addressing, mitigating, and adapting to the worst impacts of climate change. Women have a key role to play in creating a climate-resilient future.

Health & Wellness

The World Health Organization states that climate change affects the social and economic determinants of health such as clean air, safe drinking water, and secure shelter. Women are more likely to suffer from poor mental health, intimate partner violence, and food insecurity in the aftermath of extreme weather events.

Those who rely on natural resources for their livelihoods and those who have a limited capacity to respond to natural hazards such as rising sea levels, landslides, droughts, or permafrost melt are especially vulnerable to climate change. In developing countries, women are responsible for 45 to 85 per cent of food production. Agricultural production and food harvests become less predictable because of climate change which impacts women's ability to feed and provide for their families, compounding the incidence of malnutrition and poverty.

United Nations Regional Commissions highlight the differing impact of climate change across the regions of the world. In Africa, roughly 25 per cent of the continent's population suffers from water stress due to climate change. In North America, specifically Canada's North, permafrost melt threatens critical infrastructure while pollution and sea ice loss impacts Indigenous hunting, fishing, and gathering traditions – undermining Indigenous rights to self-determination and the protection of cultural practices. Climate change endangers human rights to safe housing, sanitation, and food while exacerbating existing problems of poverty and food insecurity. Indigenous women and rural women have adapted to a changing climate for generations which gives them unique expertise and generational knowledge in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction practices. Indigenous and rural women must be actively engaged as partners in developing climate policy as their meaningful participation will markedly improve the efficacy of such policies and facilitate empowerment.

Education

With climate change threatening life worldwide, girls are facing immense uncertainties in planning for their future. Hard fought gains toward girls' education risk backsliding because of direct and indirect impacts of climate change. Cyclones or landslides may destroy or damage homes and educational infrastructure such as school buildings, learning materials, or Internet connectivity. In cases of severe droughts, girls may miss school as they travel longer distances to collect safe water. Agricultural families suffering losses to income and food security may no longer be able to afford school fees or supplies. Due to historical gender inequalities, girl children are more likely to drop out of school than boys to engage in labour or care work.

While the Sustainable Development Goals outline that by 2030, all children should complete primary and secondary school, climate change severely inhibits this goal. Quality education is a key force for sustainable development and the empowerment of women and girls. Education improves individual job opportunities and public health outcomes while decreasing birth rates and the incidence of early marriage. It is also a vital tool to adapt to climate change, mitigate its most detrimental impacts, and empower youth as agents of change. Investing in girls' education, especially to foster climate participation and leadership, will synergize global goals of gender equality, quality education, and climate action. Developing girls' life skills for the green economy will improve their career opportunities and empower them to

participate in spaces from which they have historically been excluded such as science, engineering, and information technologies.

We cannot afford a continued disruption of girls' education. A Malala Fund report (2021) estimated that 4 million girls in low and lower-middle income countries will be prevented from completing their education in 2021 because of climate-related events. According to this report, it is projected that by 2025 climate change will be a contributing factor in keeping at least 12.5 million girls from completing their education each year, if the current trend continues.

In conclusion, given the multidimensional effects of climate change and its cascading impact, an intersectional approach to mitigation and adaptation is required to address structural inequalities and to highlight voices that are marginalized in the dominant climate agenda. Government, private sector stakeholders and NGOs all have critical roles to play in addressing climate change issues. The Canadian Federation of University Women supports the United Nations assessment that legislation and regulations to reduce emissions must be implemented at the national government level in order to drive transformative change.

To enable transformative change, we urge member states to:

- fulfil their Paris Agreement commitments and collective funding promises to close the finance gap, as stated at the Climate Vulnerable Finance Summit;
- ensure actions to address climate issues are grounded in gender analysis through disaggregated data collection and mainstreaming gender into National Determined Contributions;
- invest in mitigating the impact of climate migration, resettlement, reemployment and conceptualize climate change as a security risk through the Women, Peace and Security Agenda;
- direct at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to grassroots organizations, with a particular focus on Indigenous-led and women's rights organizations, to address the root causes of climate-induced migration;
- plan transition away from non-renewable energy by retraining, reskilling workers in the energy sector;
- regulate the private sector especially relating to the activities of the resource extraction sector and;
- include gender equality targets related to climate in trade agreements.

Endorsements:

Graduate Women International (GWI),
International Alliance of Women,
National Council of Women of Canada,
Women Graduates – USA, Inc.