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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 Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, 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

Since the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a rising realization on the importance and role of women in the contribution of health, transport, logistics, science, and general wellbeing of the society. However, there is also an increasing risk of infection, domestic violence, forced migration, and loss of livelihood of the women population, exposing the structural inequalities existing in our society all over the world. Moreover, the devastating global pandemic, along with the rising emergency of climate change and human right conflicts have also hindered and regressed the progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, stressing the need to heighten the awareness and strengthen the commitments of all stakeholders to put the global goals on the top of the priorities. It is urgent to put gender equality and women empowerment at the heart of all efforts as there is not much time left.

Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation (“Tzu Chi”), founded by a Buddhist nun and thirty housewives in 1966, has been working diligently to alleviate the suffering of those in need in more than 124 countries, focusing in the effort of eliminating poverty, improving health, ensuring quality education, mainstreaming gender equality, promoting environmental protection, among others, aligning its mission and vision with the Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Agreement, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and other international agreements. Upholding the beliefs of equality between all sentient beings, Tzu Chi believes that structural discrimination including gender, social status, race, ethnicity, ages, and nationalities, must be eradicated to ensure a sustainable, inclusive, safe, and prosperous future for all.

Empowering the Vulnerable Women to Empower their Communities

Tzu Chi illuminates the internal strength of the vulnerable women including the poor, elderly, widows, and women with disabilities by enabling inclusive and empowering environments for them to engage and lead climate action and disaster risk reduction. In Sierra Leone and Mozambique, Tzu Chi supports the vulnerable women in small-scale farming and sustainable agriculture practices by providing tools, knowledge, and funding, as a means to improve their livelihoods while addressing climate change and food insecurity issues. In Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, Tzu Chi encourages the elderly and single women in becoming advocates of environmental protection by establishing recycling centers which serve as community space to separate the recyclables and hosting educational events relevant to sustainable and responsible consumption and production habits. To support the Sendai Framework, Paris Agreement, Nansen Initiative while ensuring gender equality, Tzu Chi strengthens the leadership and involvement of women, regardless of age, socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity in disaster prevention, mitigation, and recovery in various incidents like the Cyclone Idai, Typhoon Haiyan, Hurricane Ida, and 921 Jiji Earthquake. Tzu Chi encourages the women to lead disaster preparedness campaigns, post-disaster relief, and rebuilding communities’ activities. Tzu Chi also incorporates environmental sustainability values while addressing the basic needs of rural women and girls by providing reusable sanitary pads, establishing reusable cloth masks and sanitary pads tailoring centers, and educational workshops. Tzu Chi acknowledges the potential of the vulnerable women by transforming them into someone who can offer help, rather than receiving assistance.

Women of Faith as the Stewards of the Earth

As a faith-based organization, Tzu Chi empowers the women of faith by promoting their leadership in environment sustainability at both local and global levels through the cultivation of sustainable lifestyle and mindset and advocacy in

international discussion and policy debate platforms. Translating the faith philosophies into action, Tzu Chi's Buddhist nuns, practitioners, followers, and volunteers, play their parts as the earth stewards by practicing zero-waste and carbon-free lifestyles while promoting compassion and mindfulness to nurture consciousness for universal responsibility in protecting the environment. With the leadership and compassion of its founder, Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen, Tzu Chi has established climate-friendly offices and monasteries, green hospitals, community recycling stations, and sustainable vegetable farms. Across the globe, Tzu Chi's women faith leaders and members promote positive behavioral change through the adoption of sustainable food practices such as eating plant-based diets and reducing food waste, application of 5R's practices including recycling and reusing, and environment-friendly innovation by upcycling waste in their communities as a means to combat climate change and ecosystem degradation. Tzu Chi's Buddhist nuns, women practitioners and scholars also often present at the high-level conferences and meetings within the sustainable development agenda to voice their concerns and provide useful inputs on the climate and environmental issues. Tzu Chi believes that women of faith are important leaders in driving responsible actions with quality values and virtues in the communities to leverage the effort in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Agreement, and other global initiatives.

Young Women-Led Movements in Building a Sustainable Tomorrow

Tzu Chi also recognizes the potential and importance of young women and girls as leaders and movers in driving a sustainable future through the provision of adequate resources and support. In its schools and colleges, Tzu Chi provides platforms for the future women leaders to be educated, trained, and empowered by incorporating climate change, environmental protection, disaster-related knowledge, and gender equality into the school syllabus as well as extracurricular activities. The young women students also receive support from Tzu Chi to promote climate-friendly lifestyle such as plant-based diet adoption, energy conservation, recycling, among others, in the school and community to strengthen collective action in sustainability. The young college students, including the indigenous girls, are also given opportunities to participate in disaster preparedness programs and post-disaster relief, locally or abroad, to countries like Malaysia, China, and the Philippines. Moreover, Tzu Chi also trains the local young women in its country of services including Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Turkey, and Thailand, through its interrelated missions of Charity, Education, and Environmental Protection, focusing on empowerment through the opportunities of education and skills training. With adequate support and resources, as well as the elimination of systemic discrimination and other barriers, young women are able to unlock their innate potential as community and international leaders. Through Tzu Chi's support and programs, young women and girls have manifested extraordinary leadership and communication skills and are able to strengthen the ties between the local issues and global action on climate and environment degradation.

Women Leadership in COVID-19 Prevention, Mitigation, and Recovery

In times of COVID-19, women and girls have also shown tremendous potential in pandemic prevention, mitigation, and recovery. In collaboration with other research academia, Tzu Chi women researchers and young women students have participated in the development of the Rapid COVID-19 Antibody Test Kits and have delivered them to Indonesia, Honduras, and Bolivia. Tzu Chi women volunteers have also led and engaged in COVID-19 prevention programs including the promotion of public health awareness and encouragement of vaccination in their communities. Cloth mask production groups have been established in Malaysia, United States of America, Singapore, and other countries to make and distribute cloth masks for people in poor

and needy communities. The women volunteers also initiated supporting programs for the populations affected by the pandemic in terms of economic stability and mental and physical health by doing fundraising, donation, care visits, and talks. A fundraising campaign '1013', meaning 'one person, one good deed' in Mandarin, has been initiated and led by the Tzu Chi women volunteers across the globe to encourage people to make donations to support for COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment procurement for the hospitals and frontliners. Women and girls, with their innate compassion and maternal instinct, can serve as the best teachers, helpers, and friends to ease the suffering of those who are in need.

With more than 55 years of experience in engaging, serving, empowering, and leading by the women population, in a broad spectrum of activities especially climate, environment, and disaster related responses, Tzu Chi strongly acknowledges the potential of women and the need to mainstream gender equality and empowerment to ensure holistic development. Tzu Chi calls upon the Commission and all stakeholders to recognize and intensify women's participation in all levels of policy planning, review, and implementations. Only with the elimination of systemic barriers and structural discrimination on women, the world can achieve sustainability for people, profit, and planet. Tzu Chi looks forward to the agreed conclusions for CSW 66 to further enhance the best practices of all actors in making the world a better and inclusive place for all genders.
