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peace for the twenty-first century”

**Statement submitted by Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary -
Loreto Generalate, Loretto Community (Sisters of Loretto),
Passionists International, Sisters of Charity Federation, Tarumitra,
and VIVAT International, 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

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary-Loreto Generalate, Tarumitra, VIVAT International, a collaborative network of 12 faith-based organizations, Passionists International, Sisters of Charity Federation and Loretto Community (Sisters of Loretto) work in over 139 countries to promote the Sustainable Development Goals, care for the environment, and advocate for human rights, especially as it relates to women and girls. Our organizations collaborate with local communities and educate over 800,000 students to claim their human rights, including their rights to equality, a healthy environment and inclusive society.

Our organizations strongly believe that the environment should be protected and preserved for present and future generations. The uncontrolled use of natural resources such as forests, land, water, and fisheries has caused distressing changes and unnecessary pressure on the global ecosystem. According to the Sixth Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, human-induced climate change already affects climate extremes in every region across the globe. In particular, our communities in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Australia are experiencing and suffering the consequences of climate change, such as heat waves, floods, droughts, and extreme tropical cyclones. The report predicted that without significant reductions in global CO₂ emissions, we will experience further increases in the frequency and intensity of heat waves, heavy precipitation, agricultural and ecological droughts, and intense tropical cyclones. Furthermore, reductions in Arctic Sea ice, snow cover, and permafrost will continue to harm the global ecosystem.

Climate change, and its wide range of adverse effects, disproportionately affects those most vulnerable in society, especially women and girls. The World Bank Poverty Overview indicated that women constituted a majority of the world's poor. Consequently, women living in poverty are the most threatened by climate change and, due to societal factors, lack the necessary education and coping capacities to face an ever-changing global climate. Following climate change-related disasters, women and girls are often the first victims. They are burdened with most of the recovery work along with extreme loads of household work imposed by society.

Moreover, climate change often causes their tasks to become more dangerous. Everyday female-designated tasks, such as retrieving water, obtaining fuel for fires, and cultivating crops, take extended amounts of time and require additional trips, leaving women more vulnerable to being attacked and injured. For example, frequent floods in India, such as those caused by Cyclone Amphan in 2020, have significantly impacted women's and girls' living conditions, education, and economic opportunities. For Kana Mondal, a local of the Sundarbans mangrove in India, the crisis after the cyclone revealed the community's vulnerabilities. She described how she had never seen such poverty with people living in desperate and hopeless conditions since her childhood. After the COVID-19 lockdown and the cyclone, Mondal felt helpless looking at their conditions: houses were flattened, most of their belongings were washed away, and thousands of families in the region were forced to take shelter on the roadside.

In addition to losing their homes, women and girls suffer from unemployment, malnutrition, food insecurity, poor sanitation, lack of educational opportunities, and trauma caused by natural disasters and family violence. These factors intensify for minority, indigenous, and transgender women who already face heightened risks of violence and death. Following extreme weather events, gender-based violence, sex trafficking, and child marriages often spike in disadvantaged communities. Apart from our network in India, Brazilian communities also reported that rates of early marriage soared following natural disasters. When families found themselves in a

precarious socio-economic situation, the commodification of women was seen as a means to gain back lost income.

Young women and girls are particularly vulnerable when schools close as a result of disasters. The United Nations reported that 94 per cent of children had their education interrupted because of COVID-19 (United Nations, “Education during COVID-19 and beyond,” Policy Brief August 2020). Communities that suffered natural disasters during the pandemic, like Eastern India, saw their school closures prolonged. Amidst natural disasters, women and girls became even more marginalized, vulnerable, and exposed to the dangers of society.

Women and girls across the globe are subjected to the harsh economic and social fallout of climate change-related disasters. They are also often neglected and/or excluded from critical decision-making processes, making it even harder for women and girls to protect themselves and their communities and obtain much-needed disaster relief, even though they make up around 80 per cent of climate refugees (United Nations Development Programme, “Overview of Linkages between Gender and Climate Change,” 2016 Policy Brief 1, Box 3).

In addition, women and girls experience a greater risk of various health impacts. According to the Canadian Ministry of Health, extreme weather events may pose a specific risk for pregnant individuals and developing fetuses. Since women tend to bear the burden of recovery after a disaster, they are also at greater risk of psychosocial health impacts. Despite this fact, women and girls remain active participants and lead the way in disaster recovery, restoring the environment, and fighting climate justice.

Women and girls in our networks are involved and have led tree plantings, biodiversity preservation projects, and environmental restoration initiatives, including oil spill clean-ups in Mauritius. Failing to incorporate women and girls, who comprise nearly half of the world’s population, into the global economy and decision-making processes heightens their vulnerability to climate change and any subsequent dangers in society.

We ask the Member States to implement the Secretary General’s Key Proposals in the Common Agenda Report, especially committing and working together to reach net-zero emissions by 2050 or earlier. We urge governments and the private sector to increase investments in governance, social protection, the green economy, and digitalization that, according to the United Nations Development Programme, could lift 74 million women and girls out of extreme poverty by 2030. Investments in modernized and inclusive education systems will allow young women and girls to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world and gain new employment opportunities in the green and digital economy.

We demand that all governments provide for the unique needs of girls in disaster risk reduction planning, response, and recovery. Consequently, girls must be engaged in meaningful consultation on policies and practices throughout the disaster management cycle. Girls need uninterrupted access to safe education spaces, play and recreational areas, latrines, and showers. The safety, protection, and dignity of girls must be upheld in situations of natural disaster.

We ask all governments and civil society organizations to include women and girls in local, national, and global decision-making processes regarding disaster management, prevention, and recovery policies, with particular inclusion of minority, indigenous, and transgender women and girls. They have the experiences, skills, and knowledge needed in their community to adapt to changing environmental conditions, so they need to be included in the design and implementation of climate policies.

In the case of natural disasters, ensure that emergency planning, response, and recovery is gender-transformative and include gender-focused resources such as fact sheets on the gender implications of disasters, gendered risk communication, and awareness materials. All governments must undertake a gender review of existing emergency management policies across jurisdictions and provide training on gender issues to emergency response teams.

Climate change requires a global multilateral, sustainable, and integrated approach to protect our planet and people. The global community needs to move forward in solidarity with women and girls. Without gender equality, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will remain a dream.
