



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

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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 International Network of Liberal 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

International Network of Liberal Women state that Gender Equality and the Empowerment of all women and girls is essential in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.

The importance of gender equality and empowerment of particularly all women and girls is at the core of International Network of Liberal Women's mandate. This means enhancing the role of women as drivers of poverty reduction, promoting female investors and entrepreneurs, recognizing the link between gender equality and safeguarding the promotion of inclusive and sustainable environment, food, water and sanitation, and directly contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water, clean environment, innovation and infrastructure, and to Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.

Women constitute most of the world's poor and are often directly dependent on natural resources as their main source of food and income. Therefore, they are more likely to suffer from the impacts of environmental degradation. Yet, women are agents of change with unique perspectives and expertise. In the last decades, 55 per cent of the improvement in water, food, security in developing countries came from programmes promoting women and girls empowerment. Ensuring the meaningful participation of women with diverse backgrounds in relevant decision-making processes lies at the heart of a rights-based, gender-responsive approach. This inclusive approach is not only a legal, ethical and moral obligation; it will also make climate action more effective.

When it comes to food and security, climate change negatively affects the production, availability and accessibility of food. Many smallholder farmers are women whose livelihoods and food sources are at risk from climate change. Women are more exposed to food insecurity than men and it can affect them differently because of their nutritional needs during pregnancy and lactation.

To reach the ambitious goal of full and equal participation of women, we have to tackle critical remaining challenges and address the structural causes of gender inequality, such as violence against women and girls, early and forced marriage, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, persistent gender disparity in secondary and tertiary education, unequal employment opportunities, the persevering gender wage gap, unpaid care work, limited control over assets and property and unequal participation in private and public decision-making.

Targeting gender equality and women's economic empowerment is not only important from the perspective of realizing women's rights but also of smart economics. Women are key agents of change and when women and men are equal, economies grow faster; less people remain in poverty, and the overall well-being of people increases. Harnessing women's potential as economic actors, leaders and consumers results in higher levels and more sustained growth rates. In our opinion, to achieve gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, it is of utmost importance to transform discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes including those that limit women's roles to being mothers and caregivers. It is equally important to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spaces, including all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation. Disasters can push women survivors into evacuation centres where they may be subjected to violence. Law enforcement may be less effective after disasters and women may not report violence.

This can be achieved through reviewing, adopting, enacting and enforcing laws and regulations that prohibit such practices, creating awareness around their harmful health consequences, and generating social support for the enforcement of these laws.

Focusing on the issue of Water and Sanitation, we consider the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation as human rights essential for the full enjoyment of life. We believe that safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, management of water resources, waste water management and water quality are all indispensable elements for poverty eradication, sustainability and security of the world.

During disasters such as flooding, women are more likely to die than men. Women and girls also suffer more from indoor air pollution due to their use of polluting fuels used for cooking and heating. Extreme weather events and increased incidence of vector-borne diseases such as malaria, combined with unequal care burdens, can cause a disproportionate pressure on women to support their families. Water scarcity increases the burden on women, who often have primary responsibility for its collection. Exclusion from decision-making can further exacerbate the stress of dealing with climate change.

The scarcity of clean water in several countries such as Africa, South America and other countries around the world has far-reaching consequences. No clean water means the impossibility to wash your hands and clothes, so that diseases can easily get a chance. Where Covid has hit such countries there is not enough access to water to fight against the virus. Women have extra disadvantages from this; among other things, they cannot give birth hygienically, so infant and maternal mortality is high. Not all the women have the time to earn an income and the young girls are being taken out of school to help fetch water. As a result, these women cannot get out of poverty, and their daughters and granddaughters do not get that chance either. Women must be trained to maintain the water pumps like repairing the water filters. This can help to address the challenge of nearly half of the global population facing water scarcity and water stress by 2030.

On the issue of sanitation and hygiene we say that by 2030 open defecation must be ended; universal access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for households, schools and health facilities should be achieved. The proportion of the women without access at home to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services should at least be halved. The inequalities in access must be progressively eliminated.

International Network of Liberal Women would like to highlight the importance of equitable, participatory and accountable water governance and especially would like to add participatory management of increased water resources.

The COVID-19 crisis requires us to reconsider the policies and practices that have contributed to our current situation. Rather than rolling back environmental laws and policies, it is time to step up environmental protection and enforcement in order to create resilience and reduce future pandemic risks, bearing in mind that short-term economic gains from deregulation often come at long-term costs.

In conclusion International Network of Liberal Women proposes on the issue of water, sanitation and hygiene to target by 2030 on:

- achieving universal access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for households, schools and health facilities;
- halving the proportion of the population without access at home to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services;
- and progressively eliminating inequalities in access since it has important interlinkages with other focus areas including health, food security and governance.