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Statement submitted by Anglican Consultative Council, Association of Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa, New Zealand, Church Women United, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Lutheran World Federation, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Inc., Salvation Army, United Church of Christ – Board for World Ministries, United Methodist Women, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, World Young Women’s Christian Association, and Women’s Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 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

Ecumenical Women at the United Nations (EW), a coalition of Christian denominations and ecumenical organizations, welcomes the opportunity to address the 66th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction.

Climate change and its related impacts undermine human rights and threaten progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Agenda by increasing food insecurity, inequalities, conflicts, disasters, and humanitarian crises. While climate change is a universal threat, the burden is not felt equally across the world. It disproportionately impacts the health and livelihoods of the poor and most vulnerable, especially those who face multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women in poverty, youth, children, people with disabilities, and Indigenous peoples.

Our scriptures and faith traditions inform our respect for all of creation. We take seriously the faith-based emphasis on demonstrating care and compassion for all living things, especially the most vulnerable. Considering our values and commitment to addressing climate change, we raise the following concerns to the Commission:

Environmental degradation and climate-related disasters

The increasing frequency and severity of climate-related and natural disasters is impacting climate-vulnerable communities and heightening environmental stressors. Oftentimes women die at higher rates than men during disasters. Women's livelihoods are also at higher risk because they dominate the subsistence agriculture sector, especially in low-income countries. Food insecurity and lack of access to resources, especially following a disaster, disproportionately impact women, affecting health outcomes and economic resilience.

Environmental degradation can be both a cause and consequence of disasters. Continued deforestation, mining, and mineral extraction, for example, will only lead to increasingly fragile ecosystems, decreasing biodiversity, and negative impacts on human life and health.

Women's experiences of climate change and their extensive knowledge and expertise in adaptation strategies make them effective actors and agents of change. Yet, women's voices are often not included in decision-making processes around risk reduction and preparedness. This exclusion reinforces pre-existing inequalities and leads to less effective interventions.

Faith-based organizations are often on the frontline response to disasters. Through coalitions and alliances, our members mobilize response teams to disaster sites, collaborate on mitigation activities, and facilitate practical sessions for their members on disaster risk reduction, resilience building and adaptation strategies. Faith leaders continue to take urgent action to prevent climate catastrophe, mass species extinction, extreme risks to human well-being, and dangerous changes in weather patterns by shifting away from overconsumption and resource-extractive economies and drastically reducing carbon emissions.

Environmental racism and economic injustice

Upheld by colonialism and white supremacy, environmental racism in the face of the climate crisis results in disproportionate and severe impacts on people of color, low-income communities, and Indigenous people, especially women in these communities. We are in solidarity with communities that have been systemically and historically subjected to pollution and poison in their homes, schools, work, and

recreation spaces, often resulting in adverse health outcomes and/or forced displacement.

Traditional knowledge held by Indigenous communities for millennia is critical for protecting our remaining biodiversity and some of the largest stores of carbon. Comprising less than 5 per cent of the world's population, indigenous peoples have safeguarded land, water, and forests from commercial interests, subjecting themselves to harassment and violence. Strengthening land tenure policies for Indigenous communities is central to advancing adaptation and mitigation as well as decreasing vulnerability and expanding adaptive capacity.

To address these issues, our members have created context-specific faith-focused resources and tools related to environmental racism and economic injustice which they incorporate in their programming and awareness-raising campaigns. Our members have made statements repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and acknowledging the importance of dismantling structures of colonialism and white supremacy.

The gendered effects of economic injustice mean women and girls are the most impacted due to pre-existing socioeconomic conditions, harmful stereotypes and cultural norms, and other vulnerabilities. Our members support women-led organizations that promote the rights of women to own land and property, particularly in countries where unequal land ownership rights increase women's vulnerability to economic exclusion and food insecurity.

Climate-induced displacement, forced migration and gender-based violence

Climate change and its impacts such as, sea-level rise, drought and water scarcity, forest fires and other extreme weather events are drivers of migration and displacement. Small island developing states, as well as communities in Africa and the Americas, are on the frontline of these trends.

Often, those who are already marginalized in society – including women and girls, especially those in low-income communities – are most vulnerable to these phenomena. They may face increased levels of domestic violence, due to increased stress of a changing environment, and they are at a higher risk of trafficking and forced labor during displacement. During disasters, women's vulnerability to gender-based violence and trafficking may increase by as much as 20–30 per cent.

A central priority of our members is to raise awareness on gender-based violence and its multiple root causes. Member organizations participate in the World Council of Churches' Thursdays in Black campaign aimed at eradicating stigma and silence around gender-based violence. Our work addresses violence against women and girls by educating, training, and providing support to local community leaders in climate-vulnerable contexts, such as Puerto Rico's declared state of emergency on gender-based violence, which can be exacerbated by the effects of climate-related disasters.

Recommendations

Ecumenical Women call upon Member States, the United Nations and civil society to:

- Include faith-based organizations as integral partners in responding to climate change and building climate resilience through consultation, inclusion in multistakeholder partnerships and ensuring collaboration at the local level.
- Address the disproportionate effect of environmental degradation and climate change on rural women through supporting resilient agriculture and other livelihoods programs, ensuring inclusion of women in the formal economy.

- Include women's leadership and a gender-responsive, inclusive approach in the design of all emergency interventions to cope with climate-related disasters ensuring they meet the needs of women, girls, the elderly, and people living with disabilities.
- Fulfill existing financial commitments and increase climate financing for women, especially for adaptation and capacity-building for disaster risk reduction and response.
- Direct financing to countries on the frontlines of the climate emergency and the most vulnerable communities supporting them in adapting to climate risks and preparing for unavoidable losses and damages beyond adaptive capacity.
- Align with the principles of climate justice to ensure women's full and effective participation in formal and informal decision-making processes related to climate action.
- Support gender-specific indicators to monitor progress through sex-disaggregated data and ensure the production of reports highlighting the impact of climate change on women and girls.
- Fully implement key UN agreements, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Paris Agreement with its Gender Action Plan (GAP), the Convention on Biodiversity, Beijing Platform for Action and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Accelerate efforts to eliminate environmental racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, through collaboration with organisations who focus on respecting human rights and providing for the prevention, mitigation, and health care for affected communities
- Act on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's call to strengthen land tenure policies especially for Indigenous communities, including recognition of customary tenure, community mapping, redistribution, decentralisation, and co-management, that can provide both security and flexibility in the response to climate change.
- Ensure just transitions to low-carbon economies, creation of decent work and quality jobs with a specific focus on economic inclusion of women, equal property ownership rights, and the provision of social protection systems.
- Raise awareness, address the risk of gender-based violence, trafficking and forced labor, including by funding programs and educating, training, and providing support to local and community leaders, that address negative concepts of masculinity which reinforce stereotypes that can lead to abuse and violence.
- Our organizations respect the dignity of every human being and are committed to leaving no one behind and making these objectives a reality.
