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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 Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights, 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

The Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR), representing over one thousand organizations and individuals worldwide working towards the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all, welcomes the focus of the Commission of 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 policies and programmes.

As an Asia-Pacific based Global South network, we would like to draw the Commission's attention to the vulnerabilities of the region to climate-related disasters. Eighty per cent of disaster-related displacements worldwide have occurred in the Asia-Pacific region over the past decade. The UNESCAP Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021 cited that over the past 50 years, environmental disasters in the region have affected 6.9 billion people and killed more than 2 million, almost all of whom were victims of water-related disasters, such as floods, droughts, and storms. Disaster impacts are likely to intensify due to climate variability and the increase in extreme temperature fluctuations can affect the frequency and intensity of disasters and make certain places and population groups more vulnerable. Climate change is not only a hazard in itself, but also exacerbates interactions between biological and other natural hazards, which in turn affects the underlying risk drivers of poverty and inequality, in a vicious circle.

The impacts of climate change are felt by all but it does not affect all equally. The climate crisis we are experiencing results from deliberate political and economic decisions of a few powerful countries and large corporations and women and girls feel its consequences the most. Women and girls are more likely to die in disasters and suffer from shortages of food and other resources. Rendered more vulnerable to the negative impacts of disasters are those who have been systematically disadvantaged due to poverty, race, ethnicity, capabilities, and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, among others.

When climate change and environmental degradation result in loss of livelihoods, the only option of affected communities is to migrate, resulting in women and girls working in informal, exploitative, and unregulated labor sectors, significantly eliminating their access to public and quality health care systems. It also puts them at high risk for trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence, and little access to justice systems.

Disasters impede access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and commodities, leading to deaths and morbidities. Extreme weather events can lead to the destruction of vital health service infrastructure, prevent access to clean and safe water, disrupt the supply of SRH commodities, and increase the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence. The realization of SRHR is essential for one to make choices over one's body and life, access opportunities, and participate in all spheres of life. Women and girls are denied these when they are constantly reeling from the impacts of disasters, and they are trapped in the vicious cycle of gender and other inequalities.

The climate crisis is now compounded by the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic that exposed and exacerbated long-standing social and gender inequalities that are manifested in many forms across contexts and are operating at different, intersecting levels and infringes upon women and girl's rights, among them, women's rights to life, health, bodily autonomy, equality and non-discrimination, and freedom from violence. The pandemic has now become a huge barrier to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including goal 3 on health and well-being and goal 5 on gender equality.

Focusing on pandemic, disaster and emergency response without an intersectional justice, gender, and equity lens is inadequate. Any public health strategy that is not mindful of human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, will not only be inept and unsustainable but will also create an enabling environment for grave human rights violations. It has already been recognized that empowering women and girls is central to achieving gender empowerment and equality, yet as the above realities illustrate, indigenous and rural women and girls remain monumentally underserved, particularly with regards to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Central to attaining gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is the universal and full realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights. In this sense, and in the light of Member States' human rights commitments, WGNRR calls upon governments to take this opportunity of the Sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women:

- CSW resolution to recommend recognition of sexual and reproductive health and rights, as a critical element of climate change adaptation and resilience. It is vital in advancing health and well-being, and thus, the full realization of SRHR will strengthen individuals' and communities' resilience and capacity to adapt to the climate crisis.
- Ensure women and girls meaningful participation in all stages of disaster related policy development and project planning is necessary to take differentiated needs into account and that diverse perspectives inform decision-making and the solutions are sustainable.
- Advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights requires the availability of quality and accessible sexual and reproductive health services and information including safe abortion and post abortion care services.
- Place particular focus on the needs of marginalized communities, people of color, gender non-conforming people, and women and girls, including the indigenous women and girls living in rural and remote areas, through addressing the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that prevent them from realizing their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and thus, making them more vulnerable to the impact of climate change.
- Promote the integration of gender, human rights, and reproductive justice framework in environmental and climate change policies.
- Increase the gender-responsiveness of climate finance with a view to strengthening the capacity of marginalized communities, people of color, gender non-conforming people, and women and girls to respond to and recover from the adverse impacts of climate change, natural disasters, and extreme weather events.
- Address structural barriers, embedded in social norms, laws, and policies that prevent individuals from realizing their sexual and reproductive health and rights and exacerbate the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic we are experiencing.