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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 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 ecological crisis has put the future of our planet and all living beings that call it home at an existential crossroads.

This crisis is a symptom of – and driven by – interlocking systems of oppression that serve to prioritise profit over people and planet. Systems of oppression of militarism, capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and colonialism place all forms of life as objects to be owned, controlled, colonised, and consumed. Women, Indigenous peoples, and poor communities in the Global South and Global North are exploited and disproportionately impacted.

In the face of an escalating crisis, States, the United Nations, and the international community have failed to address these systems and their grave impacts. Instead, States have continued to fuel militarism and military activity, which in turn are significant causes of climate change and environmental destruction, as well as of human insecurity, violence, and inequality. Conflict and war fuel environmental degradation, creating a vicious cycle of war economies.

Militaries are among the most carbon-intensive institutions in any state. Military activity directly contributes to environmental degradation through pollution of land, air, and water, which contributes to higher incidences of illnesses such as cancer and can lead to birth defects in both humans and animals. It has devastating impacts through its greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption, land grabbing, the extraction of rare earth minerals and fossil fuels for use in the arms industry, the development and production of nuclear weapons, and much more.

Militarism also has profound consequences for the Earth's biodiversity. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons supports excessive hunting and poaching and enables crimes against wildlife. In the oceans, which are warming at alarming rates, abandoned ordnance sickens or destroys marine life and marine habitats, including coral reefs.

The devastating impacts of militaries' environmental footprints are also racialised and gendered. For example, most nuclear weapons in the US and Europe have been tested on the lands of Indigenous peoples with alarming health consequences, especially for women and children, which can last for decades.

Military vehicles like tanks, warships, and fighter jets are notoriously energy inefficient, yet they are excluded from carbon reduction plans. In fact, states are not required to reveal their military emissions in their greenhouse gas inventories and Nationally Determined Contribution plans. States have also not been required to explain how they will offset military emissions to achieve net-zero by 2050, a standard set out in the Paris Agreement. Military alliances, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, continue to be a major catalyst for the perpetuation of militarism; by extension, they exacerbate the ecological crisis.

The often-overlapping impacts of armed violence and the climate crisis disproportionately affect women and girls and are directly harmful to the fulfilment and protection of their human rights, exacerbating already existing gender inequalities. Globally, women represent 70 per cent of people living in poverty and a significant majority rely heavily on land, water, animals, and plant life for their livelihood. This vulnerability further reduces their capacities to adapt to the impacts of disasters, meaning that women are also disproportionately represented in forced migration patterns. The climate crisis also has detrimental impacts on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including on maternal health.

Women are leading in conservation, agriculture, natural resource management, and environmental peacebuilding to protect our planet. Women from Indigenous communities and grassroots organisations are at the forefront as environmental defenders, standing up to corporations' extraction and destruction of their homes by mobilising entire communities to defend land and forests. However, these women are facing an alarming rate of assassination and targeted sexual and gender-based violence, often exacerbated by militarisation and arms proliferation. Women environmental and human rights defenders face ongoing, multifaceted, and often state-sanctioned and military-backed threats to their and their families' lives and livelihoods, frequently with impunity for the perpetrators. Further, patriarchal power structures prevent marginalised populations, including women and Indigenous peoples, from being equal partners in climate-related decision-making.

Despite these profound consequences – for women, for all living beings, and for the very future of our planet – each year governments around the world spend nearly two trillion dollars on conflict and violence. This is almost equivalent to the amount of money that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said is needed to meet the Paris Agreement targets to decarbonise energy systems. Furthermore, high-income countries have also failed to meet their climate financing commitments to spend \$100 billion per year to the Green Climate Fund.

The nexus between gender equality, peace, and the environment is critical for the achievement of human rights. This is why the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognised the links between gender equality and the need for reduced military spending and disarmament for social development and environmental protection. United Nations Security Council Resolution [2242 \(2015\)](#) highlighted the impacts of climate change as a cross-cutting issue for the women, peace, and security agenda. The UN Secretary-General's 2020 annual report on Women, Peace and Security addresses climate change and environmental degradation as major drivers of conflict; takes note of the socioeconomic and gendered impacts of climate change and environmental degradation as well as the need to integrate gender analysis into all climate-related policy making; and highlights the role women activists have played in demanding climate justice. The report also underscores the need for linking the agenda with the sustainable development goals to prevent future conflicts and achieve sustainable peace.

Environmental justice can only be achieved through feminist peace – an understanding that sees security not as predicated on patriarchal norms of weapons and militarism, but on societal well-being and care. Practices of feminist peace promote the right of all people to live life free from violence, persecution, environmental destruction, and economic exploitation.

The international community must take urgent action to address these root causes of the climate crisis, which is having differential impacts on women, Indigenous peoples, people living in poverty, and other marginalised communities.

Recommendations

Recognising the direct and massive contributions of militarism to the current climate crisis, and the differential impacts of militarism and the climate crisis on women and marginalised populations, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is issuing the following recommendations.

Agree to transformative principles and commitments which guarantee protections of planet and people over profit by addressing and transforming systems of inequality and oppression.

The direct, full, equal, and meaningful participation of diverse women must be a non-negotiable requirement in all decision-making spaces.

States should replicate initiatives such as the Escazú Agreement, a landmark treaty guaranteeing the full and effective implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean of the rights of access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters.

States should recognise the gender-specific impacts of the climate crisis, especially in conflict-affected states, including increases in sexual and gender-based violence, and impacts on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to include these considerations meaningfully in climate mitigation and conflict prevention policies.

All relevant actors should ensure participatory, intersectional gender-conflict-environmental analysis that includes assessments of and responses to environmental and climate change; structural and root causes of conflict and gender inequality; power, including corporate power; and colonial histories.

The United Nations must create a plan for ending armaments and reducing military spending, including by agreeing to a concrete programme for military divestment, demilitarisation, and disarmament.

States must reduce military spending, stop arms trading, eliminate nuclear weapons, and work for full disarmament. Funds must be redirected from weapons and war towards building systems of solidarity and care, mitigating the climate crisis, building green energy, ending poverty and hunger, environmental stewardship, and investing in gender equality.

Government funds must be divested from corporations that produce weapons and also divested from fossil fuels.

States must strengthen the public sector to enable the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights, and the right to a clean environment. International financial institutions should ensure that their funds reach the most vulnerable and provide universal, equitable, and gender-responsive access to essential services, including healthcare, food, housing, water, sanitation, education, and sustainable livelihoods.

States must honour their commitments to invest \$100 billion each year in the United Nations Green Climate Fund to help lower income countries – those least responsible for the current crisis – address the impacts of climate change.
