



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Sixtieth session

14-24 March 2016

**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 Women’s Year Liaison Group, 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 Women's Year Liaison Group brings together 36 national women's organizations. Our goal is to make every effort to achieve a gender equal society, and also to strengthen our involvement with environmental issues. We are committed to promoting global environmental sustainability by collaborating with other countries, especially countries currently experiencing rapid economic growth now or in the near future. We will discuss links among sustainable development, the environment, and how to ensure the full and equal participation of women.

### **Economic Development and Pollution**

In the sixties and seventies, Japan experienced aggressive postwar economic growth, causing tremendous environmental damage such as severe pollution and smog, caused by heavy traffic and industrial emission. We observed these phenomena every day in the city. River contamination and bad odour due to industrial and/or sewage also seriously damaged the ecosystem around rivers. No fish or shells were seen. Tree-cutting and heavy building in order to accommodate an increasing number of factories and housing also caused damages such as landslides. The tragedy of MINAMATA Disease, caused by the industrial bi-product methyl mercuric compound was unforgettable for everyone.

Today, thanks to improving water quality control and implementation of various laws regulating the environment by national and local governments and communities, people are now enjoying the return of birds, fish, and water plants around rivers. In Tokyo, we now have sightseeing boats on practically clean and odourless rivers. Then governor of Chiba Prefecture, Ms. Akiko Domoto, conserved Sanbanse tidal wetland. She firmly believes that conservation of biodiversity is indispensable and much more important for human life than giving profits to certain industries, builders and contractors. Then governor of Shiga Prefecture, Ms. Yukiko Kada, stood firmly against the power of economic priority, by protecting the water quality of Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan. We will continue to make efforts to keep our environment sustainable, by fighting the pressure for development which will destroy our precious environment.

### **The Environment and Gender**

United Nations document ([E/2010/4-E/CN.6/2010/2](#)) mentions the link between gender equality and sustainable development. The involvement of women in environmental decision-making, and the integration of gender perspectives into policies and programs enhances those connections. The document also states that "women demonstrate unique knowledge and expertise in developing strategies, and leading efforts to combat the effects of climate change at the grass-roots level." The Liaison Group also values women's active participation. As we describe below, women frequently exhibit their unique networking and activism in cases of environmental emergency.

Major participants in the consumers' movement such as buying safer or chemical-free products and recycling (3R — reduce, reuse and recycle) are often women. Although they are environmentally concerned consumers, they are often not aware that environmental issues are not always gender-neutral. Women, the poor and/or people in vulnerable situations all suffer from the effects of the environment.

The Committee needs to call for the involvement of more people to help address climate change and the needs of small islands, as well as industrial pollution.

### **Sustainable Environment and the Nuclear Power Plant Accident at Fukushima**

The gigantic earthquake and tsunami in northern Japan in 2011 was vast, and affected many cities, towns, farming and fishing villages. The earthquake triggered the worst nuclear plant accident in history. Its high radioactive emissions could cause serious global environmental damage. Even today, about 195,000 people are still evacuating from their homes due to the earthquake/tsunami and/or the nuclear disaster (Reconstruction Agency, 2015/9). Recently the Japanese government has decided to resume operations at many other nuclear facilities, while the solution for decontamination and disposal of radioactive waste and its safety is still uncertain. We will not support the government in resuming operation of nuclear facilities without any solid evidence of public safety. We will not give up seeking the best way to survive in this volcanic, fault-ridden country. Adequate scientific data and choices of energy safety and security are not yet available.

### **Disaster Risk Reduction and Women's Full and Equal Participation**

The third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held in March, 2015 in Sendai, where the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011 struck badly. At the Conference, participants from 187 countries discussed how to make the post-2015 world safer from natural disasters. In parallel with the United Nations Conference, civil society members also convened a Global Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, and discussed many issues of disaster risk and vulnerability such as social discrimination, inequality, poverty, etc. At the end of the Conference, "Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030" was adopted. Several members of the Liaison Group attended the Conference.

Immediately after the disaster, we observed that numerous women's groups in the inland area of the affected regions started supporting victims of the tsunami by setting up and expanding their networks to deliver relief to the coastal area. Utilizing both official and private networks, their networking was flexible, sometimes even ignoring an existing structured relationship. Some groups of women restarted their small business immediately after the disaster. Their small stores were the fastest recovering establishments both in the Otsuchicho and Takekomacho in Iwate Prefecture. They did not wait for help from others, but started doing what needed to be done. Women are not only vulnerable, but they are also people who can lead and contribute to the recovery and reconstruction after disasters. We believe that local women are capable to cope with disaster at the grass-roots level. At the same time, women need more training to enhance their capability and leadership skills.

The Japan Women's Network for Disaster Risk Reduction joined the Women's Major Group, a world gender-related stakeholder group, and played a critical role to produce the outcome document of the World Conference. The documents adopted at the World Conference were still far from what the Women's Major Group had been advocating. However, the outcome document clearly stated that women's active participation at all phases of a disaster, as well as women's leadership and empowerment are important for disaster-relief measures and programs. Furthermore, as the Major Group had been insisting, it stated that accessible and

inclusive disaggregated data by gender, age, disability and cultural perspective, should be collected as the base of policy planning and practice (UN, [A/CONF.224/CRP.1](#), 2015/3).

Regarding the domestic issues of disaster risk reduction, women's groups in Japan made recommendations to the government to ensure that women and people in vulnerable situations can take active and equal roles, so that their needs will be incorporated into disaster-related policies and management. Through lobbying activities, women's groups have achieved some law reforms regarding disaster-relief. However, we definitely need to monitor these policies to ensure they will actually be effectively implemented. The Japan Women's Network for Disaster Risk Reduction stated that we realize too often that the situation on the ground remains the same, even if significant law reform is made. They also realized gender-inequality and discrimination of gender and minority, derived from structural problems in our society, become apparent when emergency situations occur. We are committed to the realization of a gender equal society.

### **Major Activities of the Committee of the Environment of the Liaison Group**

The Committee has been studying a wide variety of current environmental issues, and periodically convening seminars by inviting experts on the subject. For our major activity goals we have been paying close attention to: 1) the trends of the 21st Session of the Conference of Parties, and 2) the impact of introduction of the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership such as safety and security of food. We also closely watch the trend of: 3) the increasing number of natural disasters, 4) regulatory standards of harmful pesticides, prevention of soil pollution, and conservation of biodiversity, and 5) processing regulation of decontamination waste from nuclear plant accidents. We support: 6) the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and 7) natural and/or renewable energy development. We seek a policy to increase and finance the use of natural energy. We, the Committee of the Environment, will continue to make recommendations to the government on these matters.

We hope that the importance of women's contributions to the sustainable future will not be understated, but be properly recognized. We cannot overemphasize the importance of women's participation at all levels of the decision-making process. Empowering women to become leaders will raise women's social status and encourage more women to contribute their time and skills to creating a safe and sustainable environment.