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Statement submitted by Church World Service, 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

Church World Service is a long-standing faith-positive moral voice that fights for a just and sustainable world for all. Since our inception in 1946, we recognized that forced migration is not something that any one organization or movement can respond to on its own. We have led grassroots efforts, alongside community partners of all faiths and non-religious supporters, to welcome displaced persons. Since our earliest responses to hunger, poverty, and natural disasters, we have emphasized sustainable community-led approaches to building resilience and enabling long-term recovery. This focus guides us today in our efforts to assist vulnerable people to lead dignified lives in the face of socio-economic and climate-related shocks.

Significant advances have been made in improving the lives of women and girls. Governments everywhere increasingly recognize the importance of policies and legislation that protect women's civil, political, and cultural rights; women's rights increasingly are considered human rights. Many countries have strategies to address gender-based violence. These gains ought to be celebrated.

Challenges remain as the 2019 Sustainable Development Goals Gender Index reports that 1.4 billion women and girls live in countries that are "failing" in gender equality indices, representing 40 per cent of the world's population. Today, 1.4 billion more women and girls live in countries whose score card for gender equality in 2019 was a "bare pass". Even high-income countries, whose indices for education, employment, and health are good, face challenges in closing other gender gaps, such as achieving equal pay and equal representation in government or at senior levels of influence and authority. In many medium- and low-income countries, pernicious obstacles prevent millions of women and girls around the world from fully exercising the rights and equally addressing their needs. Often these obstacles are cultural, religious, economic, legal, difficult to deracinate, and resistant to change. Much has been achieved, but there is still a long way to go.

Climate change is going to make this work much more difficult. We are facing a climate emergency. Uncontrolled greenhouse gas emissions have caused the planet's and our generation's greatest development and humanitarian challenge. It is the threat multiplier that could stymie our efforts to realize the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Already, the cost of repeated and frequently devastating disasters is higher than most countries can afford. Developing country governments, which are often unable to access the scale of capital needed to adapt and build community-based resilience, must divert national budgets to address both sudden and slow onset disasters. This will have consequences for national programs designed to address gaps in education, health, and access to services on which countless women and their families depend.

Climate change affects us all, but its impacts are felt most acutely among resource-poor communities in the global south – families and communities who have contributed the least to carbon emissions in the first place. Often the poorest families and communities are the least able to adapt to climate changes, including through migration. They face the most threats if forcibly displaced.

We bear witness to a stark dilemma: states whose gender policies were inspired by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and which are parties to the Paris Agreement risk seeing their progress derailed because of the lack of political will or inadequate financial resources to fully address this issue. Even as science warns us that we must keep the temperature of the planet to a maximum of 1.5 degrees, our collective global ambition – as expressed through the nationally determined contributions – still point us to 3.0 C degree world. But even in the "best case scenario" – one in which human activity generates a 1.5 C degree increase by 2050 –

at-risk communities will need to adapt to lead lives of dignity where they are, and welcome will need to be extended to those who are irreversibly displaced.

Gender inequality is defined as the pervasive gap in life chances, opportunities, resources, and rewards between men and women and boys and girls. Already there is growing evidence that climate disruption exacerbates these. In communities where livelihoods are highly dependent on natural resources, women and girls shoulder the bulk of household responsibilities. Women's rights to land and other natural resources are often more insecure than men's, and women's strategies to adapt to environmental shocks are less visible within households and communities. When livelihoods are threatened, emergencies increase and resources are scarce, and people become more resistant to change, resorting often to harmful practices that will make this worse.

Gender inequality can be further compounded by discrimination based on race, ethnicity, immigration status, or socioeconomic status, creating a multiplier effect in terms of threats. All migrants may face specific risks because their gender, sexual orientation, or gender expression. Unless we maintain our efforts to address gender inequality and close the gender gap, these risks will also extend to men and boys.

Our concern for gender equality extends to decision-making and power relations within households and communities. Migrant community associations and faith allies should be among institutions that take affirmative steps toward being inclusive spaces. This includes the development of preventative or remedial actions related to sexual exploitation and/or gender-based violence.

Climate change will directly impact human mobility. Experts predict that by 2050, some 180 million people, including 143 million people living in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the Caribbean, could be internally displaced because of climate change. We can see this already most dramatically in the form of weather-related disasters that cause large-scale displacement. Our challenge will be particularly acute with respect to the rights and needs of migrants. Women who are forcibly displaced or compelled to migrate may experience exploitation and abuses differently, depending on gendered social norms and their gender identities. Girls often face more acute disempowerment. As resources are stretched and assets eroded, they may be expected by tradition or cultural norms to make more – or deeper sacrifices – than their male counterparts.

States must take additional steps to safeguard and protect vulnerable and at-risk groups. This will require them to deliberately renew their commitments to the goal of gender equality during difficult times and simultaneously scale up climate action. It means expanding support for climate adaptation initiatives, so that those who feel the pressures of climate change most acutely have access to assets, information, and other resources needed to take adaptive measures. This could include expanded use of drought-resistant crops or rainwater harvesting, as well as expanding livelihood opportunities and markets that are less dependent on access to natural resources. Ensuring that women and girls have secure access to land, water, other natural resources, and productive assets will also be crucial to the success of climate adaptation and resilience efforts.

States must also increase the efforts to gather gender disaggregated data specific to women and girls and about migrating communities, so that evidence can be gathered about the impact of climate change on them and how the migration route affects them.

Responses to climate-induced mobility should also reflect gendered impacts of climate change. It should ensure equal access by all genders to climate adaptation opportunities and to dignity and safety when climate change leads to adaptive migration or forced displacement. In our responses to global migration, including

mobility related to climate, we must aim to ensure safety, dignity, and rights for persons of all genders; and to expand safe and inclusive spaces within our programs and communities. This requires us to understand how gender, sexual orientation, and gender expression are reflected in migration experiences and drivers, and how they shape the needs and challenges that migrants face. Using gender equality assessments, or similar tools, can assist in evaluating the specific risks faced by women, men, boys, and girls alike, especially along migration routes.

Although disproportionately affected, impoverished, and at-risk groups are not victims of climate change, nor should they be perceived as passive recipients of our aid. The determination to empower women and girls that came out of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action should guide us as we plan our climate responses, draft policies, and design programs. Let us be in no doubt: we will not solve this climate crisis unless women and girls are involved at every stage of the process in finding and rolling out climate solutions and attend to people who are most affected, with emphasis on the displaced.
