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Statement submitted by Oxfam International, 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

Oxfam affirms that the substantive representation and participation of women in all their diversity in public decision-making is critical for social progress, and the fulfilment of human rights for all. Women have long organised and led environmental, social justice, peace, labour and political movements to provide care and support in times of crisis, challenge injustice and inequality, and build sustainable futures. These efforts are often unpaid or underfunded and carried out by women who already shoulder the responsibility for family and community wellbeing. Since COVID-19 emerged, women human rights defenders, feminist leaders and activists have not only responded to the crisis but have begun to imagine and describe the deep, fundamental changes we need for a future that is just, equal and safe.

Yet, the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in the platforms and processes which affect their lives is still a distant goal. For example, 2019 statistics from UN-Women showed women only represent 25 per cent of national parliaments worldwide and the labour force gender gap among adults 25 to 54 years of age has stagnated at 31 per cent for 20 years.

The impact of COVID-19 is further eroding efforts to achieve gender equality. Global reporting reflects how women are losing their livelihoods faster yet are less likely to be included in pandemic response decision-making bodies. Women are disproportionately represented in unrecognised and underpaid front-line care capacities, while they are also responsible for care in their homes and communities. The shifting of funds to pandemic response has hindered women's access to sexual and reproductive health, while the virus has resulted in a marked increase in domestic violence globally.

Without diverse women's voices at the table, the unique challenges of this moment – the deepening and interconnected crises of inequality, climate, gender-based violence, as well as restrictions on women's access to healthcare and the gendered impacts on paid and unpaid labour – are less likely to be heard, understood and addressed.

Evidence shows the tangible and beneficial impacts of transformative feminist approaches to policy development and resource allocation – and the critical role of diverse women's voices, priorities, and power in these processes. Increasing women's influence in decision-making results in better use of resources, better policy outcomes, and surer pathways to sustainable peace. For example:

- An analysis of 181 peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2011 found that peace processes that included women were 35 per cent more likely to last 15 years. (R. Coomaraswamy, 2015)
- In the private sector, more women on managerial teams have shown to boost innovation capacity. Women identify products and services that not only meet consumer needs but solve societal problems. (Business & Sustainable Development Commission, 2017)
- Confirmed deaths from COVID-19 in countries with women at the helm are six times lower. This is partly due to these leaders' faster responses to the pandemic and greater emphasis on social and environmental well-being over time. (G. Azcona et al., 2020)

Oxfam strongly supports international feminist leadership efforts and joins organisations worldwide in calling on governments, multilateral institutions, the donor community, private sector, and civil society members to recognize and provide long-term support for women's political voice and leadership. Women's leadership is

required if we are to truly erase the gendered inequalities of our social, cultural, economic, and political systems.

We urge Member States to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all their diversity in decision-making at all levels including through institutional reforms and quotas, and in line with commitments made in Sustainable Development Goal 5.5, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its General Recommendation 30. We urge governments to define new standards of governance that are powered by ideas of feminist, collective and transformative leadership, which concentrate decision-making in the hands of women at community level, and put social wellbeing before individual or corporate wealth.

Oxfam has recommendations on six key areas which we urge Member States' to consider:

Women's Leadership in Crisis

Women bear the brunt of the health, social and economic fallout of COVID-19, yet their participation and decision-making in pandemic responses fails to reflect this, as highlighted in CARE's June 2020 report "Where are the Women?". Their survey of 30 national crisis committees found that women's representation was, on average, just 24 per cent. In 30 per cent of countries surveyed, no evidence was found that governments had made funding or policy commitments for gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health services, or women-specific economic assistance despite clear evidence of the impact of the crisis.

Member States must:

Urgently champion the meaningful participation of women in all their diversity in decision making bodies and processes for pandemic planning, outbreak response and post-pandemic recovery. This needs to happen in households, communities, council halls and parliamentary assemblies.

Ensure all response design is informed by robust, intersectional gender-based analysis, which recognize the root causes of gender inequality and violence.

Unpaid Care Work

Globally, women provide the vital work of caring for households, communities, children, the sick and elderly – essential for maintaining healthy, productive societies and functioning economies. Women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work across the globe remains one of the most significant barriers to their meaningful participation in public life, with women in low-income contexts spending up to ten hours a day on unpaid care – three times more than men.

Member states must:

Recognize unpaid care and domestic work as skilled and productive labour to be valued and recognised.

Reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care and domestic work and ensure that women and people with care responsibilities are represented in the decisions that affect their lives.

Uphold national commitments to the reporting and monitoring of unpaid care work under Sustainable Development Goal 5.4 and Indicator 5.4.1.

Gender Responsive Public Services

Gender responsive public services which are affordable, accessible, of sufficient quality, and include childcare, education and health services, are essential for women and girls. They allow them to escape deprivation and poverty and to make informed and safe decisions about their own lives. They enable women and girls to contribute to their communities as full and equal citizens. Services supporting survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual and reproductive health services, are essential for women's dignity, security, and autonomy. This in turn has a profound impact on women's socio-political and economic participation.

Member States must:

Agree to language which confirms the state as the primary duty bearer for public service provision, recognise the risks of for-profit models, and commit to the removal of financial and non-financial barriers impacting women and girls' access to public services, including the barriers caused by multiple, intersecting inequalities.

Scale up investments in gender-responsive and transformative public services and infrastructure, with the full, equal, and meaningful participation and leadership of all women in all decisions relating to design and implementation.

Implement gender responsive budgeting with a central focus on the meaningful participation of all women and their organisations in budget setting, revenue and spending and other fiscal measures at all levels.

Feminist Natural Resource Governance

Nearly 3.5 billion people live in countries rich in natural resources. In 2018 rents from oil, gas and minerals in developing countries equaled just over USD 290 billion, approximately double the global Official Development Assistance for that same period. From gender-based violence, environmental degradation, and the erosion of the rights to land and livelihoods – the oil, gas, and mining sector is a major perpetrator of women's rights violations. Women, particularly Indigenous women, are largely excluded from decision-making and policy formulation in a system of natural resource governance which is riddled with structural gender inequality and abject racism.

Member States must ensure that:

Free, prior and informed consent is obtained from impacted Indigenous and local women at community level, through an inclusive approach that recognizes Indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination.

The rights of all women to full, equal, and meaningful participation are guaranteed in community consultations and decisions on land rights, compensation and natural resource management. This includes women's participation in decisions regarding the use of natural resources and revenues from extractive industries, as well as the design and monitoring of grievance mechanisms and judicial remedies. This process must be supported with adequate funding, logistics and technical training.

States and extractive companies protect and ensure the security of women human rights defenders – particularly those that experience intersecting forms of discrimination, such as Indigenous women.

Policymaking in pursuit of a just transition to a low-carbon economy is grounded in gender power analysis and centred on the leadership and lived realities of women and communities on the frontlines of climate change. Defend and uphold the rights of women, Indigenous communities, and environments to prevent the

potential adverse impact of demand for minerals used in renewable energy technologies.

Women Peace and Security

Since the Security Council passed resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), numerous studies have illustrated the importance of diverse women's inclusion and influence in peace processes. Women are more likely to build coalitions and bridge divides to advocate for peace, are less likely than other societal groups to disrupt negotiations, and more regularly raise issues vital for sustainable peace – such as development and human rights issues. Despite this evidence, women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and security decision-making is woefully inadequate. According to 2020 data from UN-Women, between 1992 and 2019, women averaged just 6 per cent of mediators, 13 per cent of negotiators, and 6 per cent of signatories in major international peace processes.

Member States should:

Call on the United Nations to make the direct participation of diverse women a requirement in all United Nations-led or co-led peace processes.

Ensure that all formal or informal peace processes or negotiations hosted or funded by their governments include the direct, formal participation of diverse women.

Provide core, flexible and long-term funding to organizations providing services and advocating for peace, diverse women and girls' rights, and gender equality at local levels. Ensure funding responds to local organizations' needs, rather than donor interests.

Commit to developing adequately resourced National Action Plans with dedicated budgets. Ensure regular and inclusive monitoring and reporting is implemented by establishing formal mechanisms to engage diverse women and civil society in the relevant processes.

Eliminating Gender-Based Violence

In a world where, for many women, the act of stepping into the public sphere is in itself an act of disruption, governments must ensure the safety of all women participating in public life. Progressive legislation like the 2012 Bolivian law prohibiting political violence against women candidates and voters – alongside campaigns which challenge harmful social norms and promote the value and legitimacy of women's leadership – send powerful messages that democracy can only function when women in all their diversity are equal and vocal participants.

Member States should:

Work across government, political party and electoral bodies to ensure the safety of all women participating in public life (on and offline) through appropriate legislation, public campaigns and judicial remedies – recognising the higher risks faced by women who experience intersecting forms of exclusion because of race, disability, ethnicity, caste, age, sexuality, gender identity and immigration status.

Ensure that women in all their diversity, specifically Transgender women and girls, have access to survivor-centered and specialized gender-based violence services.

Urgently increase resourcing for women's rights organizations that provide survivor-centered services (shelters, psycho-social support, hotlines) and response (including legal support) and ensure services are widely published with pathways available for women who may be monitored at home.