



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
December 2021

Original: Language

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-sixth session

14-25 March 2022

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 Casa Generalizia della Societa del Sacro Cuore, Congregation of the Mission, Congregations of St. Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, Edmund Rice International Ltd., Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary-Loreto Generalate, International Presentation Association, Loretto Community (Sisters of Loretto), Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Passionists International, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Salesian Missions Inc., Sisters of Charity Federation, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, UNANIMA International, and VIVAT International, non-governmental organizations 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

As members and partners of the Justice Coalition of Religious, a global community of Catholic Sisters, Brothers, priests, and their partners in mission, we uphold a commitment to the care of the natural environment as a foundational principle of our social teaching, our responsibility to one another and to future generations. We also hold firm to our vision of a world in which the equal dignity of all people, women, men, girls, and boys is reflected in the reality governing every nation, community, and family.

We note with dismay the manifold ways in which patriarchy and the prioritization of profit over people and planet have degraded both the sacred earth, which ought to be honoured as a generous and loving mother, and the dignity of women and girls. The United Nations Development Programme has reported that women and girls comprise 80% of people forcibly displaced by the effects of climate change ("Overview of linkages between gender and climate change", 2016). Moreover, we know that the same structural inequities that make women and girls disproportionately vulnerable to climate change are the same inequities that will make them more vulnerable to trafficking, abusive labour conditions, poverty, financial exclusion, and under-education in the context of climate-induced migration. Despite the clear link between the well-being of women and girls and that of our planet (and the significant demonstration of environmental justice leadership demonstrated by women like Berta Cáceres, Wangari Maathai, Meera Karunanathan, Vandana Shiva, and Máxima Acuña de Chaupe), we continue to see women and girls underrepresented in environmental governance processes. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature found that the percentage of environmental minister positions held by women increased to just 15% in 2020 from 12% in 2015 ("Women's Participation in Global Environmental Decision Making," 2015 and 2020).

Acknowledging that our own faith communities have played our role in the entrenchment of both patriarchy and colonization, we are now making efforts—on scales large and small—to deconstruct our contributions to a culture of sexism and objectification of human and non-human beings and to build, in its place, a culture of equity, reciprocity, and sustainability. Under this common mission, our congregations have undertaken many ministries dedicated to supporting the human rights of women and girls in tandem with pursuit of environmental sustainability. Among our good practices in this vein are:

- The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame de Montreal in Cameroon are working with local partners to organize local awareness campaigns on the harmful effects of the use of chemical fertilizers and deforestation; training farmers on the use of ecological fertilizers; setting up tree nurseries that facilitate recharge of local water tables; and popularizing the use of ecological building materials and reduction of the use of plastic. They also work with OK Clean Water to convene women and girls by neighbourhood and lead them in reflection on their daily experiences in the light of the outlook of the natural environment. From these exchanges, the participants' sustainability awareness and motivation to take a leadership role in the transformation of their community emerges.

- The Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy and the Canossian Daughters of Charity Servants of the Poor in India have provided housing and economic support to poor, migrant, and tribal women and girls who had been displaced by cyclones and other environmental disasters. The Canossian Daughters also partnered with other local organisations to assist in the rebuilding of homes destroyed by environmental disasters. In their schools, the Sisters of St. Joseph also encourage girls' leadership and engage men and boys in programmes raising awareness about the harm and falsehood of gender stereotypes.

- The Don Bosco Green Alliance, which is active in 79 countries, oversees 474 institutional interventions to promote environmental education and campaign against use of plastic; work against deforestation; and encourage tree plantation. The Alliance employs a focus on the role of youth in addressing the climate crisis.

They also promote use of alternate, sustainable energy and campaign against the use of fossil fuel. Women and girls comprise half of the global leadership team and more than half of participants worldwide.

- The Society of the Sacred Heart in Mexico has integrated environmental sustainability into the curriculum and culture of their schools. Educators in these schools offer sustainability training and work with students from early childhood to youth in the design, leadership, and realization of concrete environmental sustainability projects. Through this curriculum, girls are trained to lead the projects according to a participatory methodology of citizen action. Teaching staff are also engaged in these processes, so that the entire educational community is committing itself to sustainability leadership within their families, schools, and nation. In the municipality of Zapopan, the Society also leads the organisation Comunidad Crece, A.C., which facilitates forest fire safety training for women and girls and offers a women-led programme called Farmacia Viviente, which trains women to organically cultivate and utilize herbal medicines.

Based on our experiences working toward gender and environmental justice among marginalised communities around the world, we call on the Member States of the United Nations to take the following actions to complement our efforts:

- Develop national standards for integration of environmental stewardship education and gender equality into primary and secondary school curricula, providing material and financial support for its integration where necessary and emphasizing the role of each in sustainable development
- Negotiate waste responsibility programmes with multi-national corporations selling non-biodegradable goods or packaging to require that they take responsibility for environmentally sustainable end-of-life deconstruction and recycling of all their products and/or contribute to funding for municipal-level recycling and waste collection programmes
- Establish national legislation to ban gender-based restrictions on land rights, inheritance rights, and access to financial services
- Require gender composition of all governmental ministries relating to environmental sustainability to reflect the gender composition of the national population
- Establish or enhance youth representation in national governmental ministries relating to environmental sustainability, requiring that their gender composition reflect that of the national youth population and their representation of both rural and urban districts
- Adopt agricultural regulations that discourage monoculture, chemical fertilizers, and genetically modified seeds and incentivize crop diversification and small-scale, sustainable farming practices, especially through micro-loans to women and girls
- Commit to a just transition to clean energy with all possible haste by phasing out permits for new fossil fuel infrastructure and rerouting existing national subsidies for fossil fuel research and development to (a) clean and sustainable energy source development and infrastructure; (b) technical training in clean energy operations for veteran labourers in the fossil fuel industry; and (c) scholarships for training of young adults seeking work in clean energy operations and environmental sustainability, ensuring gender-equitable distribution of support
- Heighten standards for supply chain oversight by multi-national corporations to require more effective elimination of child labour and offer a path to legal recourse for persons whose local environments have been damaged by business activities

- Increase the environmental protection budget and develop a clear and decentralized fund distribution policy that includes direct payments to recognized women's environmental protection associations

- Implement, with all possible haste and a gender-informed approach, the policy recommendations under Objectives 2 (paragraph 18.h-l) and 5 (paragraph 21) of the Global Compact for Migration in order to move toward elimination of environmental disaster as a driver of forced displacement and safe migration pathways for those who are forcibly displaced by environmental degradation or destruction

Our global family stands ready to support you in all the above measures.