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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Statement submitted by Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominican Leadership Conference, Feminist Majority Foundation, Girls Learn International, Inc (GLI), Global G.L.O.W., International Presentation Association, International Association of Schools of Social Work, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Loreto Generalate, Loretto Community (Sisters of Loretto), Passionists International, Salvation Army, Tandem Project, The Grail and Zonta 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The Working Group on Girls (WGG), a coalition of over 40 national and international non-governmental organizations with accreditation at the United Nations, came into being in the lead up to the Beijing Conference in 1995. Since then, the WGG has been advocating with and for girls, for full implementation of their human rights in all areas and stages of life. We promote girls' agency and seek to lift up their voices throughout the United Nations system and ensure the inclusion of their needs in its international agreements. We urge leaders at all levels of the United Nations and in civil society to listen to what girls have to say about the realities of their lives as they assert their right to equality and equity in all aspects of society, a right promised but still far from fully delivered.

Climate change is already fueling inequalities around the world as basic human rights and needs go unmet and the chasm of gender inequality and inequity continues to deepen. Over recent decades we have experienced increasingly negative impacts of environmental crises, further compounded by the current COVID-19 pandemic, global conflicts and unbridled industrial development. These factors have greatly increased the fragility of the environment. Those who have contributed the least to the problem are the ones who are impacted most harshly.

Girls and women are disproportionately affected by this ecological emergency, suffering higher rates of poverty due to unequal access to environmental and financial resources, public services and infrastructure according to UN-Women's 2021 Beyond Covid-19: Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice. Food insecurity and hunger are also increasing exponentially and driving flows of migration as people search for safety and security. Girls face enormous risks of violence during migration, both en route and in settlement camps, and often face long periods without education.

The UN-Women report also notes that droughts, deforestation, and land degradation force women and girls, who often bear the greatest responsibility for family provisioning, to work harder and longer hours and travel greater distances in order to make a living, produce or procure food, gather fuel, and collect water. This places them at risk of violence as they travel to complete these tasks, and severely impacts girls' ability to attend school, falling further behind their male peers.

Without access to quality education, girls are unable to adapt and prosper in a rapidly changing world that requires not only basic literacy but digital literacy, skills of global citizenship, and opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making. In the context of climate change and sustainable development, girls will need to be equipped with knowledge and skills to contribute to environmental management, climate mitigation and disaster and recovery policy planning.

In an effort to amplify girls' voices, experiences and perspectives, the Working Group on Girls hosted girls' global conversation circles in early 2021. We heard directly from them that patriarchal systems of power have enabled girls and women to be further exploited socially and economically in the wake of climate change, creating vulnerable populations whose voices and perspectives are undermined. Girls and women have the knowledge and understanding of what is needed to adapt to changing environmental conditions and can create practical solutions, however they are a largely untapped resource. Those who are directly connected to water, land, and the environment are often not given an opportunity to voice their opinions. Even where women comprise a fair share of landowners, they often lack equal access to necessary resources and technologies to make their land more productive.

Women's agricultural projects around the world have demonstrated their capacity to find creative and sustainable solutions to land management and food

production, to share practices, access financial resources, and utilize digital platforms to connect with markets. Member states must commit to invest in these types of women-led projects. Young climate feminists invite us to envision a world where all can eat and participate in growing food, where our relationship to nature is restored.

Indigenous women and girls are at the forefront protecting and preserving indigenous lands and agricultural practices yet their communities are threatened by corporate land grabs which decimate the land and destroy biodiversity. Chemical plants and extractivist practices cause extreme water, soil and air pollution resulting in increased disease, birth abnormalities, and rates of infant and maternal mortality. Frequently, there is no access to health services and support. Additionally, many girls and women experience violence perpetrated by resident workers and have no access to protection and/or justice. Shamefully, neither workers nor corporations are held accountable by governments despite legal standards and obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Labor Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention. In urban areas as well, low-income girls and women face similar health risks due to industrial pollution from plants typically located in poorer neighborhoods.

Climate change and disasters have great impacts on girls' lives. When families find themselves in precarious situations, the practice of early marriage increases, leaving girls objectified and commodified, and places them at risk of health complications from rape and childhood pregnancy. In the midst of natural disasters, girls are likely to experience multiple forms of gender-based violence, including vulnerability to prostitution and trafficking. As women and girls become isolated and further marginalized, they are exposed to increased dangers.

Girls raise the urgent matter of climate justice, and the role women and girls play in creating awareness and promoting active participation to influence change and can wait no longer. As Greta Thunberg states: "We need to change the way we treat the climate crisis .... And we need to call it what it is. An emergency."

Climate justice links human rights and development to achieve a human-centered approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts equitably and fairly, according to the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice. Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights 2020 report, notes that: "The Sustainable Development Goals are replete with references to transformation, empowerment, collaboration and inclusion. But these concepts are illusory if people are unable to exercise their human rights...many of the Goals, even if fulfilled, would fall short of meeting existing human rights obligations." (par.45)

Girls demand that adults not speak about them without them. Girls face unique issues compared to older women and must be allowed to take the initiative in leading the conversations around climate change and disaster management and planning. After all, it is their future we are all trying to protect.

We therefore join girls in demanding that governments at all levels ensure that gendered impacts of climate change and environmental disasters are addressed. Only with girls' and women's participation in decision-making and policy and program development, can effective and equitable gender-responsive policies be practiced and their human rights be realized. In many communities suffering severe impacts of climate disasters, it is the women and girls who have demonstrated the capacity to mobilize and ensure that the most vulnerable in their communities are reached. Girls and women must be at the table.

Governments and civil society must ensure that all girls have access to education, training and technology that will prepare and allow them to participate and

gain jobs in a green and digital economy. This investment will benefit all people and the planet.

A gender-just transition to a green economy will require that women have equal access to jobs as well as the education and training necessary for them to thrive in these positions. Their work in the informal sector must transition to new opportunities in the formal sector to ensure sustainable livelihoods. A gender-just economy will be one in which the economy works for women and girls instead of women and girls being disenfranchised by it.

The Working Group on Girls fully supports girls as they step forward to actively and meaningfully participate in addressing the climate crisis, and in claiming the full spectrum of their human rights at all levels of their development – a right to their voice, their agency, their full and equal participation in all of life, and the right to a sustainable future.

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