



ZONTA INTERNATIONAL'S

# STATEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

## A GENDER EQUALITY ISSUE

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**ZONTA**  
INTERNATIONAL  
EMPOWERING WOMEN  
THROUGH SERVICE & ADVOCACY

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## Envisioning a sustainable and gender-equal future

Climate change is a major global crisis. It has a negative impact on people and the environment around the world. All of us and next generations will be affected; however, not all of us will be affected in the same way.

The consequences of climate change are severe, especially for poor and vulnerable groups in developing countries. From natural disasters to food security, health, access to clean water and migration, in several parts of the world, our changing climate already has severe implications for women and girls. As families strive to cope with these changes, they may resort to negative coping mechanisms, forcing girls to leave school or marry early. Risk for gender-based violence also increases. Understanding climate change as a human rights issue is central to the fight against climate change, but also to create a sustainable, gender-equal future.

Zonta International envisions a world in which women's rights are recognized as human rights and every woman is able to achieve her full potential. In such a world, women have access to all resources and are represented in decision-making positions on an equal basis with men. In such a world, no woman lives in fear of violence. Climate change threatens human rights, such as right to life, food, water, health, education, livelihood and safety.

[United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 13 \(SDG13\) "Climate Action" emphasizes the need for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.](#) While Zonta International is not an environmental or disaster response organization, climate change disproportionately affects women and girls and action is needed from a gender equality perspective. Zonta International, as an organization pledged to empower women and girls at the global and local levels and promote justice and universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, therefore, calls for action in favor of a fair and human rights-based approach to solve the crisis of climate change in the post-pandemic world and achieve greener, cleaner and equal societies.

As stated by UN Secretary-General António Guterres on several occasions, and affirmed in the most recent UN SDG Report, "If the world does not act now, and forcefully, the catastrophic effects of climate change will be far greater than the current pandemic." Zonta International adds its voice to affirm that climate change requires swift and decisive actions and the time for such actions is now.





# Climate change is an issue of human rights

Climate change includes social and intergenerational injustice; those who have contributed least are most impacted. Climate change also affects women and men differently due to the gendered division of labor, cultural norms and different societal roles. Girls face discrimination and abuse based on their gender. Poverty, ethnic background and disabilities may multiply these challenges. Understanding the current status of women and girls, unequal structures and unfair cultural norms, and making changes are important in order to tackle inequalities in structures that place the greatest burden of the consequences of climate change on girls and women.

In addition to gender justice, Zonta International promotes climate justice. We want our societies to take bold steps toward an equal future where current and future generations have an opportunity for a good life. Zonta International wants to strengthen the human rights perspective in the fight against the climate crisis.

## ZONTA INTERNATIONAL:

- Asks governments that have not yet signed the Paris Agreement to sign the Paris Agreement.
- Asks governments who signed the Paris Agreement to actively take into account human rights, gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in defining and implementing their national climate action plans, including gender-responsive measures that are more effective and respectful of human rights.
- Calls for governments and policymakers to uphold the principles of climate justice agreed to in the Paris Agreement and ensure that the most marginalized groups do not bear the brunt of the climate crisis.





# Women's involvement is needed

Studies have found that greater female representation in national parliaments leads countries to be more likely to ratify international environmental treaties and adopt more stringent climate change policies, which are greatly needed if our efforts to curb the effects of climate change are to be successful. Moreover, among the countries that signed on to the Paris Agreement, those countries led by women have made some of the most committed national climate action plans.

Surveys have found that women's concerns about climate change are greater than men's, even in parts of the world where the consequences of climate change are not already impacting their lifestyles. Women have diverse experiences of how best to adapt to climate change and how to most effectively control it. If properly involved, women and girls can set and promote climate-friendly lifestyles; they can become change agents and effective leaders in mitigating the risks of climate change. However, women often have limited opportunities to influence decision-making. It is, therefore, important to include more women and girls in decision-making roles in the area of climate change going forward.



## ZONTA INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS TO:

- Set up more gender-balanced governing bodies to integrate gender sensitive climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning, as per SDG 13.2 and the Paris Agreement.

# Girls' education is key

Education is a human right and key to developing societies. However, today, globally more than 130 million girls between the ages of 6 and 17 do not have access to education. There are many reasons for this lack of access, including cultural norms, child marriages and premature pregnancies, but also increased workloads as a result of more natural disasters and extreme weather conditions caused by climate change.

Girls' education, however, also has a key role to play in combating climate change. Investments in girls' education yields high returns, such as breaking cycles of poverty, fostering economic growth and empowering women both in the home and workplace. Education also improves the capacity of girls and women and their communities to adapt to climate change and offer solutions and innovations to climate change.



## ZONTA INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS TO:

- Arrange education for girls and support girls' access to education.
- Include basic education on climate change and its consequences to nature and societies for all students, recognizing and addressing the social and economic factors aggravated by climate change (as per SDG13.3.1).



# Equal economic opportunities are needed

The economic impact of climate change more severely affects populations in developing countries, especially those who depend on agriculture, whose actions and lifestyle, at the same time, contribute less to climate change. In these environments, women's and girls' unpaid agricultural and domestic work is essential to the livelihoods of their families and communities. Climate change threatens the material resources on which these livelihoods rely, and increases domestic and subsistence workloads, therefore primarily impacting women and girls. At the same time, persistent gender discrimination in accessing education, training, material and financial resources, technology, and land property hinders women's and girls' opportunities to diversify their livelihoods. Besides gender disparities in accessing and controlling resources, women in these environments also have reduced access to income-generating opportunities, either locally or through migration, face high gender pay gaps and often cannot even control the proceeds of their own labor, when cultural norms put them under the control of the male "heads" of their households.

On the contrary, women's economic empowerment boosts productivity, diversifies income and increases income equality.

## ZONTA INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS TO:

Ensure that climate adaptation and mitigation plans address the unique needs of women and the barriers to women's full participation in the economy, including

- Childcare and elder care services.
- Occupational segregation.
- Informal work.
- The gender pay gap.
- Legal and social restrictions.





# Climate change has a detrimental effect on health and safety

Climate change disrupts societies and individual lives. As competition for natural resources increases, conflicts may ensue. Climate change may also spur migration and generate climate refugees as a result of sudden climate events and/or changing climate processes; resulting agricultural disruptions and other economic factors force people to migrate to find paid work, putting women and girls especially at greater risk of exploitation, violence and trafficking in persons.

Climate change also undermines food security. In developing countries, it is largely the responsibility of women and girls to search for water and firewood for households, which takes time. As droughts increase, these tasks require even more time. Extended search distances may also put girls and women at risk of gender-based violence.

In addition to the depletion of income, climate change presents different health threats for men and women. According to the World Health Organization, during natural disasters, women and girls are more likely to be severely affected or killed as a result of their roles and responsibilities in society. In climate-affected environments, reproductive health can be at risk, such as nutritional deficiency during breastfeeding and lack of access to health care during pregnancy. Again, implications for women's and girls' health and safety are unique and serious.

## ZONTA INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS TO:

Include women in the formation of disaster preparedness and response plans.

These plans should:

- Recognize the unique needs of women and girls.
- Prioritize their health and safety.
- Include responses to gender-based violence.



## Raising awareness is critical

Raising awareness on both climate change and its related gendered impacts is critical. Accurate understanding of the climate crisis and its implications on our future is key to engage us all in creating a more sustainable future. People need basic knowledge on how they can participate through their own everyday life choices. For example, women are often key decision-makers for household purchases. As such, women can contribute to sustainable consumption behaviors that can contribute to climate mitigation. People also need to understand that unless adequate and gender-sensitive measures are put in place, gender inequality may also increase due to the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls. Also, SDG 13.3 concentrates on improving education and raising awareness on climate change.

### ZONTA INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON ITS MEMBERSHIP TO:

- Increase their own awareness of climate change and on its gender-related consequences and raise awareness locally.
- Include gendered climate change advocacy actions in their advocacy plans.
- Support the inclusion of women at the national and local tables of decision-makers on environmental sustainability.
- Promote girls' education and the inclusion of climate literacy in schools, as well as to promote girls' science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies to increase gendered scientific and technical contributions to climate change mitigation.
- Advocate for national policies that take into account women's economic opportunities and ensures their full and equal participation in the economy.

**Climate is changing and we need to change too!**