



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Sixty-eighth session**

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**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 Young Diplomats of Canada, 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**

Young Diplomats of Canada champions youth aged 15-29 as critical voices in dismantling systemic patriarchy and promoting the autonomy of gender-marginalized people.

Poverty is not gender-neutral; gender inequality underlies and maintains poverty globally. Poverty has disparate impacts on youth, including hindering our ability to meaningfully engage with social, educational, and political institutions. As global citizens, we recognize our duty to foster an equitable and sustainable society by elevating the voices of youth; developing forums for our ideas and concerns; and dismantling structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice.

In advocating for gender equality, we prioritize the needs of marginalized and racialized communities, including 2SLGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, Indigenous and Black communities, survivors of gender-based violence, migrant communities, and people living in rural and remote areas. We urge decision-makers to address the challenges faced by young people via the frameworks of intersectional feminism, anti-oppression, and decolonization. These frameworks underlie all of the recommendations in this statement.

Our statement highlights three critical areas for the attainment of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to eradicate poverty and reform institutions from a gender perspective:

1. Addressing the gender wage gap and income inequality.
2. Addressing the climate crisis and gendered harms experienced by marginalized communities.
3. Addressing barriers to accessing state services and investing in public infrastructure.

### **Addressing the Gender Wage Gap and Income Inequality**

#### *Prioritizing Women's Financial Autonomy*

Legal and cultural barriers compromise women's agency in managing and growing wealth. Due to structural discrimination, women's ability to exercise financial autonomy is limited. Patriarchal norms and systemic barriers in financial institutions inhibit access to services like banking, loans, asset purchases, and family wealth management.

Even when integrated into the financial systems, the digital divide and financial illiteracy create differential access for women and barriers to exercising financial autonomy. In rural and remote areas, women may face additional barriers manifesting from a lack of official documentation and social or geographical isolation from banking institutions.

Supporting women's financial autonomy and empowerment on a global scale is urgent given income disparity and the mounting gender wage gap. According to the World Bank, 95 countries still do not guarantee women equal pay for equal work. Women are more likely to allocate funds towards household familial needs; their financial empowerment uplifts children and youth. Building financial independence and resilience among women can also safeguard them against domestic violence while supporting their capacity to escape abuse.

Recommendation:

- Build autonomy among women by designing financial tools from a gendered perspective to structurally dismantle normative and legal barriers to accessing and navigating financial institutions.

### *Social Security and Protection Infrastructure*

The gender wage gap, economic crises, and austerity measures escalate income and food insecurity, unemployment, and increased poverty among women and girls. Unpaid domestic, family enterprise, and reproductive labour further jeopardize young women's financial autonomy and access to fair wages. Social security is particularly inaccessible for women with precarious immigration status. Prioritizing women's right to social security and protection, including parental leave, is essential to combating the feminization of poverty.

When support is accessible, the benefits are insufficient to adequately improve financial outcomes. Consequently, women and youth become vulnerable to exploitative work, including contractual jobs with inadequate pay, little to no benefits, and hazardous working conditions with increased vulnerability to increased exposure to workplace GBV. In the Global South, 75% of the female workforce is in the informal labour economy. Reforming social security infrastructure by universalizing access to increased benefits will ensure equitable and sustainable financial outcomes for women.

Comprehensive parental leave for families is an important mechanism for addressing the feminization of poverty. Paid parental leave protects families with young children from poverty,

ensuring access to income while parents engage in childcare. Facilitating paid employment and parental leave will reduce poverty among single mothers. A well-paid and protected leave policy maintains earnings and attachment to the labour market. Parental leave promotes an equitable redistribution of childcare labour and unpaid domestic work, thereby reshaping patriarchal norms surrounding how care work is performed and compensated.

Recommendation:

- Implement a robust social security and protection regime that provides cash transfers, living subsidies, and access to basic amenities, including food, shelter, and healthcare, collectively adequate to support a reasonable standard of living. This must include the provision of a comprehensive and national standard of paid parental leave and employment protections during the parental leave.

### **Addressing the Climate Crisis and Gendered Harms Experienced by Marginalized Communities**

#### *Female Leadership and Gendered Crisis Planning*

Women's work, health, and safety are uniquely precarious in the nexus between climate change and gendered poverty. A majority of the world's poor are women and girls; they are disproportionately impacted by climate disasters and their gendered risks. Concurrently, women's lack of adequate access to decision-making, land and natural resources, financial capacity-building, healthcare, mobility, and educational opportunities increases their climate vulnerability.

In pre-disaster contexts, women's unequal access to socioeconomic and political resources inhibits their access to post-disaster recovery, assistance, and compensation. In post-disaster recovery, women can be powerful agents of change and make valuable contributions to reconstruction but are often undervalued.

Meaningful reform of crisis planning and management must include female leadership and the implementation of a gender-responsive framework. Local civil society organizations, women's trade unions, non-profit networks, and Indigenous communities must be engaged to effectively address the needs of vulnerable communities.

**Recommendation:**

- Invest in female leadership in crisis management, and prioritize gender considerations in disaster risk reduction and response that account for equitable resource allocation and women’s specific vulnerabilities in the post-disaster context.

*Decolonizing Climate Change Policies*

Climate disasters devastate communities and ecosystems, and Indigenous peoples are often the first and hardest impacted. Though only 5% of the global population, Indigenous communities account for 15% of the global poor and are disproportionately vulnerable to displacement and depopulation.

Social and environmental movements by Indigenous peoples call for the decolonization of climate change policy, full inclusion of Indigenous leaders in decision-making, and transition away from growth-driven capitalism. Growth-driven capitalism is central to the erasure and suffering of Indigenous peoples, and is a root cause of global economic inequity and worsening income distribution.

Colonial climate policies fail to root out capitalism. Their failure to adequately reduce emissions or transition to clean energy accelerates harm to Indigenous communities. This harm intersects with gender-based inequities, disproportionately impacting Indigenous women and youth vulnerable to extreme poverty. The systematic exclusion of Indigenous communities from climate change policy will continue to exacerbate climate change, reinforcing the harm to Indigenous communities.

**Recommendation:**

- Invest in and include Indigenous communities and nations as full partners in climate policy decision-making, and respect Indigenous rights to self-determination with free, prior, and informed consent in developing climate policies.

**Addressing Barriers to Accessing State Services and Investing in Public Infrastructure***Gender-Transformative Childcare and Benefit Reform*

Tackling gendered poverty is contingent upon creating universal, not-for-profit, accessible, and affordable childcare. Women’s financial insecurity is perpetuated by the lack of investment in care infrastructure and child benefits. This, combined with the disproportionate burden of care work

placed on women, pushes women out of the labour market or into low-paying, unsustainable employment.

Gender-transformative poverty reduction requires building robust childcare infrastructure with fulsome child benefits. This childcare infrastructure should also aim to remedy working conditions and remuneration of childcare workers. Additionally, child welfare and tax benefits can increase women's labour force participation, inject financial resources into households, and fight the epidemic of child poverty. Indexing benefit amounts and eligibility to inflation will ensure the sustainability of this system, thereby supporting low-income women and children.

Recommendation:

- Transition towards a universal-coverage model of childcare and child benefits, support the provision of childcare services and benefits coverage that is inclusive of all and without discrimination based on socioeconomic status, race, immigration status, and disability.

### *Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare Reform*

Healthcare for gender-marginalized people is critical globally. The inaccessibility of quality, affordable healthcare is a gendered issue whereby women, girls, and gender-marginalized people cannot fully exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. Securing these rights is indispensable to achieving financial liberation and empowerment for women.

Poverty and economic deprivation impose structural limitations on women and girls' access to healthcare. Many essential sexual and reproductive healthcare services are either wholly inaccessible or restricted through criminalization, such as the lack of availability of contraception and abortion bans. Without access to healthcare, poor women become more vulnerable to adverse health outcomes like unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexual violence.

When sexual and reproductive healthcare is accessible, it is often cost-prohibitive and exacerbates poverty. For example, period poverty – a lack of access to menstrual products, hygiene facilities, and education – drives economic insecurity by creating additional costs and lost income for people who menstruate. Therefore, providing free menstrual products and establishing paid menstrual leave can address income disparities and job security.

Recommendation:

- Implement a healthcare regime that provides free or low-cost, equitable, and accessible reproductive healthcare to all communities of women and gender-diverse individuals, including equitable access to contraception, abortions, and paid menstrual leave.

\*This statement is endorsed by the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University and Mediators Beyond Borders International - ECOSOC-accredited organizations.