

Statement of the CEDAW Committee on Gender and Climate Change

(adopted at the 44th session of CEDAW 20 July to 7 August, New York 2009)

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) expresses its concern about the absence of a gender perspective in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other global and national policies and initiatives on climate change. From CEDAW's examination of State Parties reports, it is apparent that climate change does not affect women and men in the same way and has a gender-differentiated impact. However, women are not just helpless victims of climate change – they are powerful agents of change and their leadership is critical. All stakeholders should ensure that climate change and disaster risk reduction measures are gender responsive, sensitive to indigenous knowledge systems and respect human rights. Women's right to participate at all levels of decision-making must be guaranteed in climate change policies and programmes.

As the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted, climate change has differential impacts on societies varying among regions, generations, ages, classes, income groups, occupations and gender lines. Women are the main producers of the world's staple crops, but they face multiple discriminations such as unequal access to land, credit and information. Particularly at risk are poor urban and rural women who live in densely populated coastal and low-lying areas, drylands and high mountainous areas and small islands. Vulnerable groups such as older women and disabled women and minority groups such as indigenous women, pastoralists, nomads and hunters and gatherers are also of concern.

Safety nets and insurance for social protection are essential to national adaptation plans as part of poverty reduction strategies.ⁱ However, many women do not have access to health care facilities and social security.ⁱⁱ And while CEDAW recognizes that all women have the right to adequate standards of living, housing and communications as well as immediate shelters during crisis situations due to natural disasters, women often face discrimination to access these. The crisis in climate change potentially open new financing, business and employment opportunities for women living in cities as well as countryside, but gender inequality persists in these sectors.

Sex-disaggregated data, gender-sensitive policies and program guidelines to aid Governments are necessary to protect women's rights to personal security and sustainable livelihoods. Policies that support gender equality in access, use and control over science and technology, formal and informal education and training will enhance a nation's capability in disaster reduction, mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

The Bali Action Plan that emerged from the 13th Conference of Parties to UNFCCC reaffirms that economic and social development and poverty eradication are global priorities, and affirms that a shared vision needs to take into account “social and economic conditions and other relevant factors.”ⁱⁱⁱ Gender equality—including equal participation of women and men as well as accounting for the differentiated impacts on women and men from climate change and its response measures—should be included in UNFCCC agreements in alignment with various international agreements including but not limited to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and ECOSOC Resolution 2005/31.

Gender equality is essential to the successful initiation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate change policies. The CEDAW committee calls on States Parties to include gender equality as an overarching guiding principle in the UNFCCC agreement expected at the 15th Conference of Parties in Copenhagen.

ⁱ Technical Summary, report by Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007, Cambridge U. Press, Cambridge, UK 2007 p. 69.

ⁱⁱ See Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world, UNDP, New York 2007.

ⁱⁱⁱ [Decision 1/CP.13, preamble and 1(a)].