



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

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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 Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

We welcome the priority focus of this 66th session of the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW66) on “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes”. In this context, the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights would like to stress the importance of advancing a just energy transition that tackles climate change and gender inequality.

In this statement we briefly propose a set of policy recommendations for States and other stakeholders to embed principles of human rights and gender equality in new low carbon energy systems. Our dependence on fossil fuels is the main cause driving the climate emergency that poses existential risks to the full range of women’s rights and to the possibilities to advance gender equality. The compounded effects of increased weather events with slow-onset events, such as droughts and the sea level rise caused by the high concentration of green-house gasses in the atmosphere is causing loss of land and territories, greater proclivity to disease and affecting food production systems. These impacts fall disproportionately on marginalized women, who often do not have equal access to economic resources, information, and services to cope with the erosion and rapid loss of life supporting systems.

Furthermore, due to the highly gendered nature of responsibilities in relation to energy, women suffer a much greater burden because of energy poverty. Today 759 million people continue to live without access to electricity and more than 2.6 billion people lack access to clean cooking facilities. In disadvantaged communities, it is common for women to spend several hours a day performing domestic work related to energy collection, including gathering biomass for cooking, lighting, and heating. This time-intensive activity also generates enormous indirect economic costs and limits the opportunities for women to enjoy their rights to education, work, health and an adequate standard of living, as well as to participate in public and political life. Additionally, the burning of biomass has an adverse effect on the health of women due to the indoor air pollution that it creates. In developing countries with high mortality rates overall, indoor air pollution ranks eighth in terms of the risk factors that contribute to women’s disease and death.

Opportunely, the transition away from fossil-fuel energy sources towards renewable energies is well underway, ushering in a new, cleaner model of powering societies across the globe. However, this process is not necessarily gender and rights compliant. The green energy sector need not reproduce harms associated the fossil fuel energy model of the past 200 years. The extractivist fossil fuel-based energy model has been gender blind and neglected women’s energy needs and skills. Moreover, it has failed to include women in consultation processes regarding the use of community lands and resources for fossil fuel extraction projects and neglected women’s perspectives and needs in land use agreements, resettlement plans and local community benefits. As a result, the existing model has generated gender inequalities in access to and control of energy.

There is a unique opportunity for the fast-growing green energy sector to reject prevailing gender-blind approaches to energy governance, generation, and provision. We call on States to rethink the energy transition not only as a technical shift from one source of energy to another, but to harness the transformative potential of the renewable energy transition to address the environmental gaps in the present energy model and to promote gender equality. The transition to renewable energy should seek to ensure universal access to sustainable energy while protecting the environment and fostering gender equality. To inform the discussions, we would like to put forward the

following recommendations for States and other relevant stakeholders to foster an alternative energy model:

- Ensure that human rights and social and gender goals are prioritized in renewable energy policies and legal frameworks. This includes addressing data and evidence gaps and promoting enhanced data collection and gender analysis on renewable energy policymaking.
- Combat harmful gender roles and stereotypes in the energy field. It is key to consider how women perceive themselves and how the State, families, markets, and communities perceive women in the energy sector to change harmful social norms and practices which exclude women from actively participating in energy systems.
- Adopt robust measures to protect women human rights defenders that protect their land and territory from the impacts of large-scale energy infrastructure projects. Women human rights defenders play a critical role in the conservation of local ecosystems and should feel free and safe to raise their voices.
- Regulate transnational corporations and business enterprises involved in the energy sector to ensure their activities do not encroach upon fundamental rights. This obligation includes ensuring businesses do not discriminate against women and violate human rights throughout energy supply chains, including in the extraction of minerals necessary for the development of renewable energy technologies (e.g., cobalt, lithium and copper), as well as in the installation and operation of renewable energy projects.
- Promote gender-responsive financing of energy projects and policies that deliver gender equal outcomes and foster the role of women as key agents of change in the articulation of socially inclusive and sustainable energy solutions. To this end, it is key to incorporate a gender approach to tax policies, State budgeting and to financial services providing credits and loans for the development of sustainable energy projects.
- Give priority to community-managed and women-led renewable energy solutions such as mini-grids and energy cooperatives that give opportunities for the diversification of energy ownership, management and production with more democratic and equitable outcomes, and greater opportunities for women to engage and lead the provision of renewable energy solutions. These alternative energy arrangements have been successful in both, countries in the Global South and the Global North, in reducing gaps in energy access, combating gender inequalities, provide employment opportunities and accelerating the transition to low-carbon and efficient energy technologies.
- Promote and protect women's equal land rights and security of tenure, in the context of renewable energy projects. Land is a vital resource providing shelter, housing, food and income, thus legal rights to land are critical to avoiding women's dispossession and impoverishment.
- Implement tailored programmes to ensure the inclusion of women in the workforce of the renewable energy sector. Consider conducting gender audits, tailoring specific education, training and mentorship programmes and networks, as well as providing greater workplace flexibility for a greater work-life balance.
- Prioritise the needs of women and their communities who have been historically marginalized and whose lifestyles produce low greenhouse gas emissions. A gender just transition should challenge the current prioritisation of energy

systems and confront the high-consumption energy patterns of the populations with higher-income levels.

- Finally, ensure compliance with international human rights law. The human rights framework provides a wide range of norms and standards that offer guidance to States and other stakeholders to ensure that women, especially those from marginalized communities and groups, can shape the policies that affect their lives. At its core, the human rights framework provides normative and analytical tools to deliver energy justice by identifying and understanding how asymmetrical power relations operate and articulate responses to transform them. Human rights law thus provides a compass for developing new energy systems that are not only renewable and low carbon, but gender-just.

The energy transition represents a massive shift in the way we power and organize our societies and economies. As such, it presents a wealth of opportunities to address the gender and human deficits and to embed principles of gender equality and human rights in the design of new energy systems. As the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights explained, actions to transition to renewable energy offer a ‘triple dividend’ by reducing emissions, contributing to more biodiverse societies and tackling poverty and inequality through employment opportunities and increasing sustainable energy access. This is particularly the case for women in all their diversity who continue to be under-represented in the energy sector and who are over-represented in assessments of energy poverty.

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