

## 60th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, 14 – 24 March 2016 The Netherlands' Civil Society Priorities for the Agreed Conclusions

The 60<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW60) comes at a decisive moment, as the world is experiencing the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Conflicts and climate change are forcing people to leave their homes. Peace and security for *all* form a prerequisite for sustainable development. War, conflicts and climate change often disproportionately affect women and children. In light of the challenges posed by these developments and of the theme of the 60<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW, “Women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development,” the Netherlands’ civil society has identified a set of priorities for the Agreed Conclusions of CSW60, focused on three key areas:

### 1. Reaffirmation of existing women’s human rights and sustainable development frameworks and recognition of the linkages between them

The Netherlands’ civil society calls for the CSW60 Agreed Conclusions to reaffirm the commitment made by all governments at Beijing in 1995 and to take immediate action to deliver on and implement existing women’s human rights, gender equality and sustainable development frameworks. The agreed language in these conventions provides a solid base to further build on and from which to hold governments accountable for the commitments made as we move towards implementation of the *2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development*.

#### The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Reaffirm the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and the outcomes of subsequent reviews;
- Reaffirm that the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, its optional protocol, and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* are critical for the full realization of gender equality, and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls and the achievement of the *2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development*;
- Reaffirm the outcomes of other conferences that address gender equality, women’s and girls’ human rights and empowerment, including the Programme of Action of the *International Conference on Population and Development* and the *Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, the key actions for their further implementation and the outcomes of their reviews;
- Recognize the linkages between gender equality, the human rights and empowerment of women and girls and sustainable development, and the complementary nature of the *Beijing Platform for Action*, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *Paris Agreement*;
- Recognize that the full implementation of Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security is essential for sustainable development and for realizing gender equality, the human rights and empowerment of women and girls;
- Recognize that realizing gender equality, the human rights and empowerment of women and girls is only possible with women’s and girls’ leadership and the full involvement of women-led, feminist, LGBTI and human rights organizations and women human rights defenders and that this is a prerequisite for the implementation of the *2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development*.

### 2. Recognition of the fact that combating climate change means empowering women

According to the most recent UNHCR estimates available, no less than 20 million people had been displaced by natural disasters in 2008 alone. Nine out of ten of these disasters have been identified as climate-related<sup>2</sup>. Scientists predict the number of climate refugees may rise up to 250 million by 2050.<sup>3</sup> Climate change disproportionately affects the poorest and most vulnerable groups - a majority of which are women and girls - and has to be recognized as a significant threat to global peace and security. Key to effectively combating climate change, is systemic change and the empowerment of women and girls, so that they can be transformed into agents of change, in their roles as i.a. leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs and food manufacturers.

<sup>1</sup> European Commission (ECHO), ‘ECHO Factsheet: Syria Crisis’: p 1, published in February 2016, available on [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf) last accessed on 10 February 2016

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, ‘Climate Change, Natural Disasters and Human Displacement,’ p. 3, published in 14 August 2009, available here: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=4901e81a4&query=climate%20change> last accessed on 09 February 2016.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, ‘Top UNHCR Official Warns about Displacement from Climate Change,’ published 09 December 2008, available here: <http://www.unhcr.org/493e9bd94.html>, last accessed on 09 February 2016.



The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Commit to the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur on Gender and Climate Change;
- Ensure that the terms and conditions for eligibility for benefiting from The Green Climate Fund are gender sensitive;
- Ensure that the SDG indicators by which progress is measured are gender sensitive, so that Member States may be held accountable for their commitment to women;
- Ensure that the data used to implement the promises made in climate change conventions are gender-differentiated so that the position of women and girls becomes explicit;
- Commit to supporting women as leaders, on all levels of decision-making, especially in the area of natural resource management;
- Ensure that sufficient resources are dedicated to innovation for adaptation to climate change and actively involve women and girls in the development of new (gender sensitive) technologies and strategies;
- Support sustainable female entrepreneurship;
- Call on Member States to ensure that rural women have access to and control over resources and the expertise and funding required to efficiently and sustainably cultivate the land they live on, as well as to ownership over aforementioned land and resources.

**3. Development of a gender perspective on the refugee crisis**

Both women and men are victims of war and conflict, and flee their homes. However, women and girls do not have the same opportunities as men and boys to cross borders and are more often left behind in conflict areas or refugee camps. Personal circumstances can make the journey more difficult for women and girls, such as breastfeeding, menstruation and pregnancy, or responsibility for children and other family members. Lack of documentation, required to prove their citizenship, deprive refugees (more often women refugees and children than men) of access to education and health care.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, refugee women and girls and LGBTI people are more prone to falling victim to (sexual) violence, exploitation and human trafficking than men.<sup>5</sup> Within host countries refugee shelters are often insufficiently equipped to deal with (trauma of) sexual or culturally related violence. In the process of integration, even progressive, host countries sustain traditional gender patterns. Although refugee women have a more vulnerable position than men, states should acknowledge and make use of the added value of migrant women to their economies. As shown in a recent ILO report, specifically migrant women's labour participation rate is higher compared to that of migrant men.<sup>6</sup> The Netherlands' civil society thus calls upon all stakeholders to address the inhumane situation for women and girls fleeing war and conflict, while at the same time recognizing their strength and potential.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Ensure a gender perspective in all refugee policies, actions in fragile states and conflict zones, refugee camps and during asylum and integration processes in host countries. The particularly vulnerable situation for women and girls has to be addressed;
- Allocate additional resources for women's and girls' necessities and take urgent action to combat sexual abuse and trafficking in conflict areas and refugee camps;
- Ensure the active participation of women and girls in peace processes and peacekeeping in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' and its subsequent resolutions (e.g. 1889);
- Ensure support for refugee women civil society activists and organizations to participate in processes necessary to achieve sustainable peace, democratic change and transitional justice;
- Call on Member States to ensure access to inclusive and quality (mental) health care for refugee women and girls;
- Call on Member States to ensure refugee women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights, through the provision of comprehensive sexual education, access to contraceptives and the distribution of emergency reproductive health kits, regardless of age and marital status;
- Call on Member States to ensure access to local labour markets for refugee women and girls;
- Call on Member States to ensure inclusive, non-gender stereotyped, integration policies in host countries.

<sup>4</sup> Women's Refugee Commission, 'No Safety for Refugee Women on the European Route: Report from the Balkans,' p. 7, published on 16 January 2016, available here: <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/issues/gender-based-violence/research-and-resources/1265-balkans-2016>, last accessed on 09 February 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, 'Female Refugees Face Physical Assault, Exploitation and Sexual Harassment on their Journey to Europe,' published on 18 January 2016, available here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/female-refugees-face-physical-assault-exploitation-and-sexual-harassment-on-their-journey-through-europe/>, last accessed on 09 February 2016.

<sup>6</sup> ILO, 'ILO Estimates on Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology,' published on 15 December 2015, available here: [http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS\\_436343/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_436343/lang-en/index.htm), last accessed on 09 February 2016.