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Zonta Says NOW to gender-equal climate action

1. Introduction

The climate crisis is a human rights crisis – and a women’s rights crisis¹.

UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, at CSW66, 2022.

How are the climate crisis and gender equality linked? As greenhouse gas emissions increase, they warm the atmosphere and trigger extreme weather events such as heatwaves, droughts, bushfires, ice loss, sea level rises, floods, and storms². These events cause social disruption and magnify existing inequalities—people lose their homes and jobs, the poor get poorer, there is more stress and violence—and **gender inequality accelerates**. We can break this chain of events by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and closing the gender gaps in education, economic opportunity, and decision-making.

Zonta Says NOW to gender equal-climate action encourages Zontians to

- learn about the climate crisis to understand how increased greenhouse gas emissions ultimately lead to increased gender inequality
- advocate for the rights of women and girls in a future where gender equality is threatened by extreme weather events, sea level rise, changes in agricultural patterns and global insecurity and
- take on leadership positions in our communities, workplaces and parliaments so that women are equally represented around decision-making tables.

We are living in a decisive decade for humanity. United Nations scientists have shown that we must limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels to preserve a liveable planet—and we have already reached 1.1°C. The UN recommends reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050.³

As Zonta Says NOW champions, we will actively reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and stand up for the rights of women and girls in this decisive decade for humanity.

2. The Problems

- Human activity has altered almost 75 per cent of the earth’s surface⁴, and around 1 million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction.⁵
- Global climate change impacts, such as intense heat, drought, bushfires, floods, and storms, displaced 30 million people in 2020⁶ and, without increased action on climate change, could displace around a billion people by 2050⁷.
- The plastics industry is the fastest-growing source of industrial greenhouse gases in the world, and plastic can seriously harm ecosystems, injure animals, cause chemical harm, carry invasive species, and impede biological processes such as carbon sequestration.⁸
- Climate change acts as a threat multiplier catalysing water and food scarcity, pandemics, and displacement⁹.

- Most of the world's poor¹⁰, illiterate¹¹ and chronically hungry¹² are women.
- Women and girls are more likely to be injured and killed in extreme weather events¹³.
- In some cultures, girls are not taught to swim or climb trees, clothing can restrict movement, and women are not permitted to leave their houses without a man, impeding their ability to escape or seek help in a disaster¹⁴.
- During times of scarcity, women face difficult choices to survive—do they prostitute themselves¹⁵ or marry off their children to get money for food¹⁶?
- Globally, the average gender pay gap is around 20 per cent¹⁷, and in the OECD, women aged 65 and older receive 26 per cent less income than men from the pension system¹⁸.
- During the COVID pandemic, women suffered disproportionate job and income losses¹⁹, and violence against women increased²⁰.
- Climate change is likely to exacerbate sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls²¹.
- Globally, one-quarter of parliamentarians are women²², and fewer than 30 per cent of climate negotiators are women²³, making it difficult to hear women's voices on the world stage.

3. The Solutions

- Girls with 12 years of education have more life choices, can build more resilient communities, and have fewer children than girls with no education²⁴. Increased knowledge about, access to, and quality of voluntary family planning, and 12 years of high-quality education, are essential to achieving the UN's 2019 medium global population projection of 9.7 billion people by 2050²⁵.
- About 218 million women in lower and middle-income countries have an unmet need for modern contraception, and it is estimated that nearly half of their pregnancies (111 million annually) are unintended²⁶.
- Globally, women have around three-quarters of the legal rights of men²⁷. Increasing their legal rights will enable women to legally access credit, sign a contract, register a business, and open a bank account—making it easier to obtain and improve land or start businesses to support their families.
- Ending violence against women will enable more women to participate at their full potential²⁸.
- Science, technology and innovation are central to reaching the targets of the Paris Agreement, yet globally, women made up less than a third of the world's science researchers²⁹. Advocating for more women and girls in STEM will ensure more diverse thought and gendered climate solutions.
- Countries with more women in their parliaments adopt more stringent climate policies³⁰.
- Inspiring more women into leadership positions in their communities, workplaces, councils, and parliaments is crucial to tackling climate change effectively³¹.

4. What can WE do?

1. Get the facts

- We can increase our awareness of climate change and its gender-related consequences by
 - reading books, watching videos, reading articles and listening to podcasts from reputable sources, e.g. United Nations agencies³², TED Countdown³³, NASA³⁴, David Attenborough documentaries³⁵, Jane Goodall Hopecasts³⁶, Outrage and Optimism podcasts³⁷
 - learning more about the Sustainable Development Goals³⁸ and what is happening in our state, region and community.

2. Lead by example

- Reduce our emissions with ten simple actions³⁹ and set our own sustainability challenges e.g. eliminate plastic for one week, walk and use public transport, and demonstrate recycling practices.

3. Add our voice

- Raise awareness locally about climate change and its gender-related consequences by
 - Developing climate/gender equality elevator speeches or lists of key facts as conversation starters with family, co-workers and friends⁴⁰. Practice saying them.
 - Joining and hosting local events/marches to raise awareness.
 - Talking with local organizations and elected officials to raise awareness and discuss solutions.

4. Advocate

- Write to and meet with local councillors to learn about local sustainability initiatives and see how the needs of women have been considered (or not) in the development of climate change response and disaster management 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 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 consider women's economic opportunities and ensure their full and equal economic participation.

5. Collaborate

- Work with Zonta clubs to magnify our voice, educate on climate change, and raise awareness of local issues to achieve gender-equal climate justice.
- Work smarter, not harder, by collaborating with like-minded organisations, for example, UN Women⁴¹, 1 Million Women⁴², and Plastic Free July⁴³. Find out who is working for gender-equal climate justice in your area.

Through Zonta Says NOW, let's take gender-equal climate action by learning, advocating, and leading the way through the climate crisis—so we can build a better world for women and girls.

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