

## **A FEMINIST APPROACH TO CLIMATE JUSTICE**

“Women are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts such as droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events. They also have a critical role in combatting climate change, but need to be better represented at all levels of decision making. Empowering women will be a significant factor in meeting the climate challenge.”

*-Former UNFCCC Executive Secretary, Christina Figueres*

### **THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY**

Climate change is already a reality and it is occurring earlier and faster than expected. At the current level of 1°C warming, we are starting to see the consequences through more extreme weather and rising sea levels.<sup>1</sup> To limit global warming to 1.5°C - beyond which even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people - the world’s leading climate scientists have warned that we have only a dozen years to act. They also say that this is affordable and feasible. The one key thing missing at this point is political will.<sup>2</sup> At the current level of commitments, the world is on course for a disastrous 3°C of warming. This would have dire consequences, in particular for the younger generations.

### **A FEMINIST APPROACH TO CLIMATE JUSTICE**

Industrialized countries and multinational corporations are responsible for the current climate crisis. The effects of climate change, however, are felt most acutely by people who are least responsible for causing the problem: communities in the global South and low-income communities in the industrialized North.<sup>3</sup> These are also the people who have least access to resources and technology to adapt to the consequences and to act to reduce their emissions.<sup>4</sup>

*Climate justice* means addressing the climate crisis not merely as an environmental problem but as a complex social justice problem, placing at the center populations that are particularly vulnerable to its impacts. It means tackling the root causes of the climate crisis, including unsustainable production, consumption and trade<sup>5</sup> while making progress towards equity and the protection and realization of human rights.

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<sup>1</sup> IPCC. 2016. Online. <https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Friends of the Earth Europe. Online. <http://www.foeeurope.org/climate-justice-in-depth>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Council of Canadians. Online. <https://canadians.org/climatejustice>

A *feminist approach to climate justice* thus means to address the issue of climate change as a complex social issue but also through an intersectional analysis that challenges unequal power relations based on gender and other characteristics, such as socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, nationality, ability, sexual orientation, age, etc. This type of analysis advocates for strategies that address the root causes of inequality, transform power relations and promote women's rights.

### **WOMEN'S VULNERABILITY TO THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

Climate change disproportionately affects the most vulnerable social groups. Women and girls, in particular because of the roles and tasks that they are assigned (taking care of the land, carrying water, caring for children and the family) and the discrimination (restricted access to resources and to education) they face in many regions of the world, are affected more than men by the impacts of climate change. For example, in the event of a natural disaster, the risk of death is 14 times higher among women and children than among men<sup>6</sup>. The risk of violence and sexual assaults also increase for women and girls during displacement caused by extreme climate events. And the impacts of climate change have disastrous consequences on their health (food insecurity, exhaustion, heat, waterborne diseases), their safety, their rights, and their economic situation (lost harvest, higher food costs, forced to buy water, less time for a job).

### **CLIMATE CHANGE AND FORCED MIGRATION**

According to the United Nations<sup>7</sup> and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)<sup>8</sup>, there are currently more than 68 million forcibly displaced persons in the world. Among these, there are 25 million refugees, 3 million asylum seekers and more than 40 million internally displaced persons. Many of them were forced to leave their homes due to natural disasters or environmental degradation. For women and girls, forced displacements and time spent in refugee camps mean heightened risks of various forms of violence, including sexual violence.

According to the Geneva Convention, a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. Because they are not covered by this definition, people who are forced to flee because of climate change-related events cannot currently be

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<sup>6</sup> AWID. Online. <https://www.awid.org/fr/nouvelles-et-analyse/justice-climatique-pourquoi-les-femmes-doivent-etre-integrees>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations. "Migrations". Online: <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). 2018. "Migrations dans l'espace francophone : approche, actions et perspectives pour la Francophonie." Online: [https://www.francophonie.org/IMG/pdf/rapport\\_migrations.pdf](https://www.francophonie.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_migrations.pdf)

granted the status of refugee and are therefore not protected under international law.<sup>9</sup> As the current UN Secretary-General and former UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres highlighted: « There is a protection gap in the international system that need to be addressed. »<sup>10</sup> This is also an important women's issue as studies have shown that up to 80% of global refugee and displaced populations are women and girls.<sup>11</sup>

### **WOMEN ARE AGENTS OF CHANGE**

Women are not merely victims of climate change: they are also important agents of change and the bearers of solutions<sup>12</sup>. During natural disasters, for example, women can play a crucial role when they are integrated in the response because their knowledge of social networks allows them to identify faster the potential victims, where they are located, and the specific needs of women, men, girls and boys. In addition, women are at the forefront of climate change adaptation strategies. Women, and indigenous women in particular, often live in synergy with their environment, have a thorough knowledge of it, and play a leading role in defending, preserving and protecting it.

The environmental knowledge of indigenous women in particular has been undervalued and could make a significant contribution to climate change research and policies. Indigenous peoples have in-depth knowledge of the territories that have been the source of their livelihoods for generations. Their knowledge is on a much finer spatial and temporal scale than science, and includes understandings of how to cope with and adapt to environmental variability and trends.<sup>13</sup> Indigenous women who use forest area for subsistence, for example, generate specific and valuable knowledge through their daily practices as seed, fuel, and fodder collectors.<sup>14</sup>

Various studies<sup>15</sup> point to the direct link between the under-representation of women in decision-making bodies and the lack of knowledge of greenhouse gas reduction mechanisms. This under-representation seriously compromises the effectiveness of climate change mitigation measures,

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<sup>9</sup> AQOCI. 2016. "L'environnement les personnes réfugiées dans le monde". Online : <https://bdsdi.aqoci.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Fiche4.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Reuters. 6 June 2011. "World needs refugee re-think for climate victims: U.N". Online. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-refugees/world-needs-refugee-re-think-for-climate-victims-u-n-idUSTRE7553UG20110606>

<sup>11</sup> Women's Environmental Network. 2010. "Gender and the Climate Change Agenda". Online. <https://www.gdnonline.org/resources/Gender%20and%20the%20climate%20change%20agenda%202021.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> CQFD. 2016. "Femmes et changements climatiques". <https://www.aqoci.qc.ca/?Fiche-technique-Femmes-et>

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO. Online. <https://en.unesco.org/links/climatechange>

<sup>14</sup> Kaijser and Kronsell. 2013. "Climate change through the lens of intersectionality", *Environmental Politics*, p.7.

<sup>15</sup> Center for International Forestry Research : <http://www.cifor.org/gender/gender-redd-analyzing-womens-roles-sub-national-initiatives/>

which require the involvement of all stakeholders. In addition, women remain largely in the minority in decision-making and public policy-making bodies. This was strikingly illustrated at COP 21, where only 7% of the government leaders were women.

We applaud Canada's collaboration with the Women's Environment and Development Organization to train new negotiators from countries in the Caribbean region at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Canada also sponsored two participants who attended COP23 as negotiators for their country of origin. This work needs to be strengthened and expanded to include the participation of women negotiators from other countries, and especially African countries.

### **POLICY COHERENCE FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

Burning fossil fuels is the main driver of climate change. Yet countries around the world are still subsidizing this industry to the tune of 500 billion dollars a year<sup>16</sup>. The Canadian government itself offered 10 billion dollars a year in subsidies to the fossil fuel industry between 2012 and 2017<sup>17</sup>. Such subsidies are incoherent with the objectives of keeping global warming under 1.5C and realizing women's rights. In fact, to ensure policy coherence in favor of climate justice and women's rights, Canada should start by doing its fair share in terms of climate finance and Official Development Assistance (ODA).

#### *Climate finance*

At the COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009, « developed » countries agreed to provide at least 100 billion dollars a year in finance, by 2020, to developing countries for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Canada's fair share<sup>18</sup> of this commitment has been estimated at 4% of the 100 billion dollars and at \$1.9 billion annually through bilateral channels.<sup>19</sup> Canada has committed to increase its contribution in 2020 to reach \$800 million a year, which is less than half of our fair share.

#### *ODA and the Feminist International Aid Policy (FIAP)*

Canada claims to be a leader on gender equality and women's rights. While speeches, conferences, and policies are useful, however, now is the time to actually walk the talk and invest in areas that will further women's rights around the world rather than corporate interests in the

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<sup>16</sup> Les Affaires. 2018. Online. <https://www.lesaffaires.com/secteurs-d-activite/ressources-naturelles/500-milliards-de-subventions-aux-energies-fossiles/605288>

<sup>17</sup> Oilchange International. 2018. "Risking it all". Online. [http://equiterre.org/sites/fichiers/risking\\_it\\_all\\_-\\_oci.pdf](http://equiterre.org/sites/fichiers/risking_it_all_-_oci.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> The fair share is calculated based on the average share of providers' Gross National Income (GNI).

<sup>19</sup> AidWatch Canada. 2018. Online. <http://aidwatchcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Final-October-Climate-Report.pdf>

fossil fuel sector. Today, Canada has a Feminist International Aid Policy (FIAP) but its contribution to ODA is amongst the lowest in OECD countries (Canada ranks 16<sup>th</sup> out of 22 donor countries)<sup>20</sup>. Canada reported to the UNFCCC that “Canada’s climate finance will also have a focus on the empowerment of women and girls and gender equality.”<sup>21</sup> More work is needed to ensure Canada’s future climate finance plans are gender-responsive and promote a feminist approach to international climate assistance.<sup>22</sup>

The internationally recognized target for ODA contributions by donor countries like Canada has been set decades ago at 0.7% of the countries’ Gross National Income (GNI). In 2017-2018, Canada contributed 0.25% of its GNI to ODA (around \$5.3 billion), less than half of its fair share (which would be slightly over \$14 billion). In fact, Canada’s contribution to ODA is at a historically low point and less than half what it used to be in 1991-1992<sup>23</sup>.

If Canada is serious about climate justice and women’s rights, it can actually contribute its fair share by investing an additional \$10 billion in climate finance (\$1.1 billion) and ODA (\$9 billion). Conveniently, that’s the same amount the country spends on fossil fuel subsidies. The money is there. What we need is political will.

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<sup>20</sup> AidWatch Canada. Online. <http://aidwatchcanada.ca/canadian-aid-trends/canadian-oda-disbursements/#history>

<sup>21</sup> Canada’s Seventh National Communication on Climate Change and Third Biennial Report—Actions to meet commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Government of Canada, 2017. Online.

[https://unfccc.int/files/national\\_reports/national\\_communications\\_and\\_biennial\\_reports/application/pdf/82051493\\_canada-nc7-br3-1-5108\\_eccc\\_can7thncomm3rdbi-report\\_en\\_04\\_web.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/national_reports/national_communications_and_biennial_reports/application/pdf/82051493_canada-nc7-br3-1-5108_eccc_can7thncomm3rdbi-report_en_04_web.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Canada’s Seventh National Communication on Climate Change and Third Biennial Report—Actions to meet commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Government of Canada, 2017. Online.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

## ADVOCACY ASKS<sup>24</sup>

1. Support more effectively the leadership of women, and indigenous women in particular, in the areas of climate change adaptation and mitigation through gender mainstreaming across climate finance plans. In particular, encourage the development of climate and gender specific projects with local communities in countries facing the greatest impacts of climate change.
2. In recognition of the deep environmental knowledge of women, and indigenous women in particular, as highlighted in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ensure and support their effective participation in decision-making bodies for the development and implementation of policies on climate change at the international, national and local levels.
3. Put an end to fossil fuel subsidies and instead use this money to ensure that Canada contributes its fair share in terms of climate finance and Official Development Assistance in a gender-responsive way.
4. Take a leadership role on the international stage to fix the protection gap for climate refugees
5. Identify clear indicators and track progress on the integration of a gender and intersectional perspective into all policies and programs related to climate change, taking into account the differential impact of the latter on women, and indigenous women in particular, their rights, and their livelihoods.
6. Reduce the structural inequalities between genders (access to resources, land, education, etc.) and defend women's rights in order to enable women and girls to better cope with the impacts of climate change and prepare for potential natural disasters, in Canada and internationally.

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Please support a feminist approach to climate change by endorsing this advocacy paper, sign on with the following link <https://forms.gle/y2i8dmzsjAC5v5Z9>