



NGO NEWS

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Healthy planet: Our responsibility, our opportunity

Stockholm, Sweden hosted the first [United Nations Conference on the Human Environment](#) June 5–16, 1972, which made the environment a pressing global issue for the first time. Around 122 countries participated in the conference, and the participants adopted a series of principles on the environment, including the Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan for the Human Environment. Participants came to the realization that “human activities are the principle determinants of their own future.” Formation of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is a direct result of the conference, as well as the designation of June 5 as [World Environment Day](#), a platform to raise awareness on environmental issues, marine pollution, overpopulation, global warming, sustainable development and wild life crime.

Now, 50 years later, humanity is facing a triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, pollution and waste that is affecting the current and future well-being, prosperity, equality and peace of all. It is against this backdrop that Sweden hosted the Stockholm+50 along with Kenya June 2–3, 2022 not only to commemorate the 50th anniversary, but

Humanity is facing a triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, pollution and waste that is affecting the current and future well-being, prosperity, equality and peace of all

also to increase the pace of transition towards a sustainable and green society, more jobs and an environment in balance for everyone, where no one is left behind. It should be noted that going into Stockholm+50, there was a deep distrust among groups; a divide on many issues between the Global North and the Global South with regard to environmental and climate injustices, inequity in natural resource use,

growing threats to environmental activists and a shrinking civic space, ongoing conflicts and the current war in Ukraine.

At the conference, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged the participants to “Lead us out of this mess, the triple planetary crisis is killing and displacing ever more people each year.” He further stated,

biodiversity loss is threatening more than three billion people and pollution and waste are killing nine million people a year. According to him, global wellbeing is at risk, because we haven’t kept our promises on the environment. He called on member states to do more to protect the basic human right to a clean healthy environment for everyone, especially for “poor communities, women and girls, indigenous peoples and

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Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Older Persons

Our world is witnessing a huge demographic transformation. In 2019, there were 703 million persons aged 65 or over in the world, roughly 10 percent of the global population. By 2050, the number of older persons will double to 1.5 billion, that is one in six people in the world will be aged 65 years or over. (For the first time in history, the world will have fewer children than older persons.) Women comprise the majority of older persons, as they tend to live longer than men do. In 2019, there were only 63 men for every 100 women over the age of 80.

As the world population continues to age, the human rights dimension of ageing is becoming a growing concern. Older persons are entitled to the same human rights as everyone else. Yet, they are facing many challenges to the full enjoyment of their human rights—barriers and structural challenges in the world of work, access to services and resources due to discriminatory laws and policies, underfunding and lack of accessibility and affordability. These prevent them from the exercise of other human rights, including the right to an adequate standard of living, especially when adequate and equitable social protection systems are not in place.

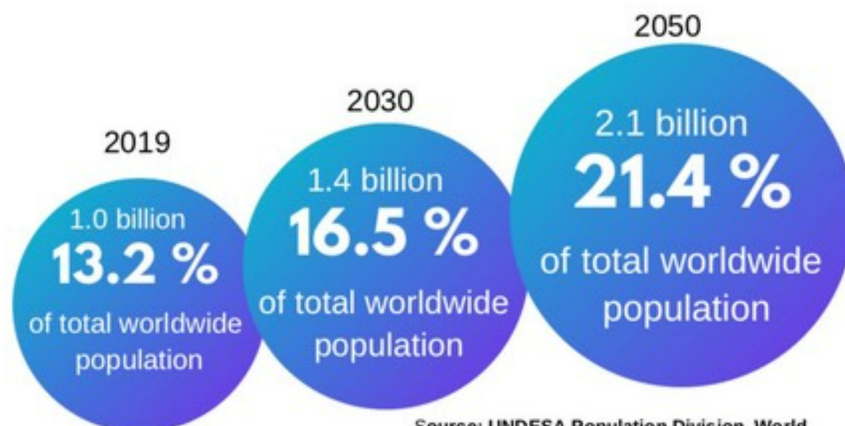
The COVID-19 pandemic magnified pre-existing human rights violations: denial of health services, physical and social isolation; labelled as vulnerable and branded as burdens to societies. The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on older persons showed the gaps in human rights protection of this

invisible segment of the population and the existing violations of their rights. Abuse of older persons exists in both developing and developed countries, yet it is typically underreported globally. Although the extent of their mistreatment is unknown, its social and moral significance is obvious and it demands a global multi-faceted response.

Legislations and policies on older persons at the national and international levels are from the perspective of welfare and social programs; they do not take a human-rights based approach that views older persons as equal rights holders. The lack of a comprehensive and integrated international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons demands that legislations and policies be put in place to ensure the full and meaningful participation and contributions of older persons to their societies.

What is ageism, and how does ageism affect the human rights of older persons? The Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons defines ageism as stereotypes, prejudice and/or discriminatory actions or practices against older persons that are based on their chronological age or on a perception that the person is “old” (or “elderly”). The use of the term “elderly” perpetuates stereotypes about older persons, suggesting that they are frail and vulnerable and lack capacity. For this reason, the UN General Assembly decided in 1995 that the term “older persons” was the appropriate term to use for purposes of the UN.

Growing Ageing Population - 60+ Years



Still, most welfare systems continue to rely on age cut-offs for social policy entitlements and mandatory retirement ages that exclude older persons from the labor market. Ageism is based on the assumption that older persons are somehow lacking because of their age.

Older persons experience ageism individually and as a social group. At the individual level, ageism is adopted and internalized from childhood based on prejudices. Social and cultural norms determine the attitudes and expectations of behavior and roles of older persons at the family and community levels. Older persons also internalize negative and prejudiced attitudes due to pervasive stigma associated with old age, which can lead to distorted perceptions of self-worth, isolation, neglect, abuse, abandonment and a lack of control over their lives. At the societal level, internalized ageism consciously or unconsciously informs the way the rights and equal treatment of older persons are institutionalized in legal, medical, educational, political and other social systems. Often chronological age is used to define older persons in domestic, regional and international policies and legislation, contributing to widespread ageism.

Ageism and other forms of isms:

- Ageism and ableism: older persons with disabilities may have access to fewer or different services, experience age cut-offs for disability benefits and personal assistance, etc.
- Ageism and sexism: older women face problems on their legal status, access and control of property and land, access to credit, and inheritance rights. They are vulnerable to violence, abuse, and other harmful practices like witchcraft.
- Ageism and racism: a combination of age and race can create aggravating forms of discrimination and increased risk of dehumanization of older persons.
- Ageism and discrimination against older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons: they are most vulnerable to social isolation, financial insecurity, homelessness and poor health outcomes.

Manifestations of ageism and discrimination in the lived realities of older persons:

- Health and long-term care—older persons are excluded from clinical studies. Deeply rooted age discrimination within the health sector can include denial of medication, rebukes, and isolation, abandonment, neglect and negative

attitudes toward older patients. Ageist behavior of healthcare professionals can result in complete disregard for the opinion of patients regarding their treatment, improper medical care, inaccurate medical diagnosis and objectification of older patients.

- Violence and abuse—can take many forms, including physical, financial, psychological, social and sexual. They can happen within families and in homes, the workplace, care institutions, public spaces, the media, cyberspace, and emergency settings. Family members, caregivers, legal guardians, health professionals, government workers and financial representatives perpetrate violence and abuse.
- Employment and retirement—older persons face ageism and age discrimination in access to work. Some of these include mandatory retirement ages, age limits in recruitment, negative stereotypes about the ability of older persons to work and societal norms. Opportunities for training and career advancement are often denied to older persons, and they are subjected to salary reductions and forced early retirement. All these hinder the right of older persons to work.
- Social exclusion—stereotypes and prejudices contribute to social exclusion and they leave the paid labor force are at risk of poverty, especially the oldest age categories. Older persons are not included in neighborhood activities.
- Financial services—age limits, digitalization and poverty or low income create barriers for older persons to access financial tools to access goods and services.

Ageism and age discrimination are human rights violations. Since ageism is so pervasive globally, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion of older persons are anticipated as the norm. Stereotypes are deeply imbedded within individuals, organizations and practices, and they inform domestic, regional and international laws and policies. The tremendous diversity and contributions of older persons must be taken into account in all efforts to address ageism and age-discrimination. Strategies designed to counter ageism must form a central part of “health ageing,” “active ageing,” or “ageing well” initiatives.

This write-up based on “[Report of the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of all human rights by older persons](#)” by Claudia Mahler.

Global Debt Crisis and Climate Change

Global debt rose to nearly \$300 trillion in 2021, states the Institute for International Finance. Is too much debt a good or bad thing? Who is bearing the burden of too much debt? According to Kristalina Georgieva, the managing director of the [International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF), “there is a growing risk of a debt crisis” due to borrowing during COVID-19 pandemic, tightening monetary policy and the rising cost of servicing debt in U.S. dollars. Around 30 percent of developing and emerging markets and 60 percent of low-income countries are at or near debt distress. The financial stability of these countries is threatened not by domestic mismanagement, but by global shocks.

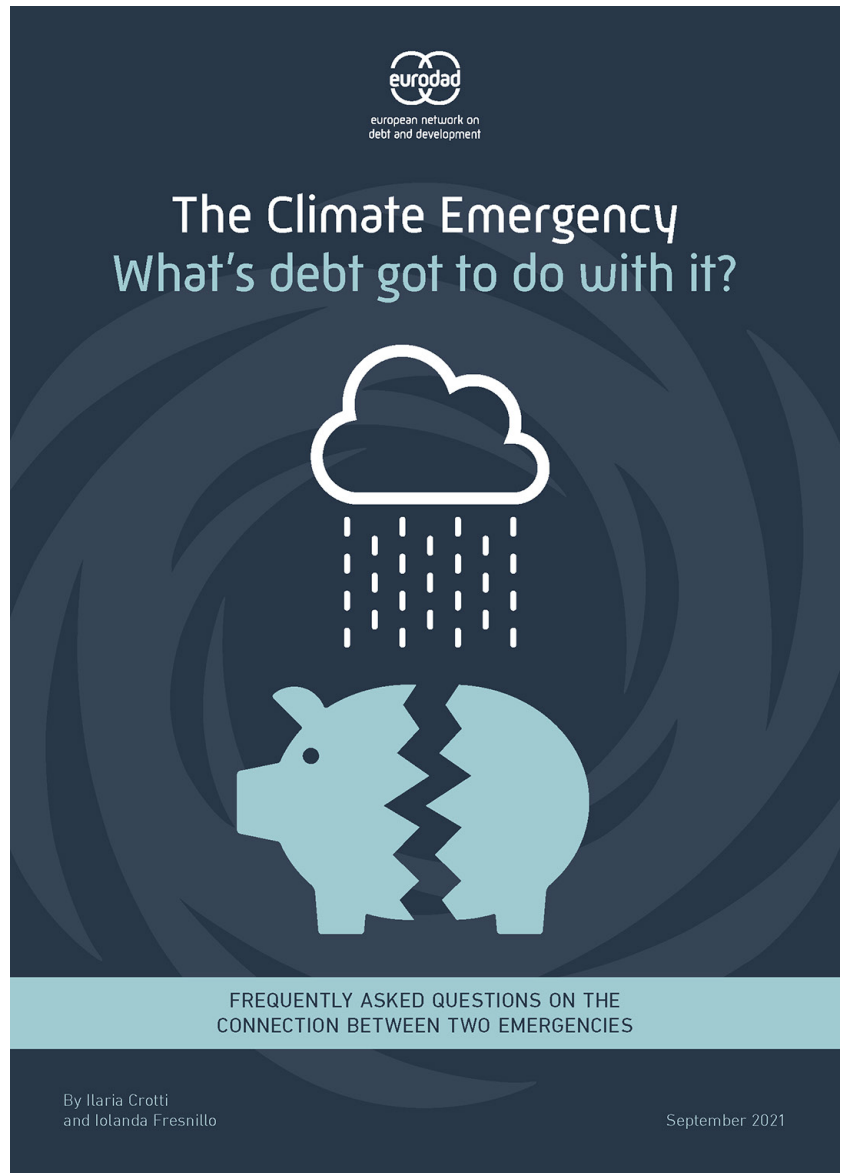
Many of these countries are not able to repay their debts. Failure to service their debt affects their fiscal health, leading to debt distress, default, and debt restructuring. This situation will lead to higher borrowing costs in the future. Countries in the global south, confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic and climate emergency, are caught between fighting the pandemic, investing in climate mitigation and adaptation measures and paying their debts. Not only that, austerity measures adopted by these countries while confronting climate emergency and debt crisis, disproportionately impact women and children. Their ability to access basic services are limited and increase the burden of unpaid care work—gathering and producing food, fuel, water and providing for their families.

According to the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), one in eight nations spends more on debt than on social services—education, health and social protection. “Before the pandemic, countries with the highest levels of debt service were spending at least three dollars on debt for every dollar paid to essential social services.” Debt servicing leaves little money for sustainable economic, social and environmental development. People living in countries with high debt burdens will not be able to break free from poverty and deprivation. According to the former UNICEF chief, the COVID-19 pandemic and the debt burdens have resulted in expenditure reductions in education, child protection,

nutrition, sanitation and hygiene services, at a time when there is need for increased investing in improving schools and education systems.

Currently there is no single framework to bring all creditors and debtors at the table to facilitate the restructuring of debt. In 2020 and 2021, the G20 established the [Debt Service Suspension Initiative](#) (DSSI), which allowed for deferrals on official debt services for 73 low-income countries, especially those most impacted by the pandemic. This measure provided \$13 billion in relief to 48 participating countries; only one in three eligible countries has participated in this initiative.

There is an urgent need for a global response to the debt crisis; international agencies, creditors, and



national governments should work together to reduce debt burdens. The current system lacks transparency and participation from the indebted countries. It is lenders, whether sovereign governments or private financiers, who set the rules and definitions. It is another form of colonization, a form of irresponsible financing. To prevent a debt crisis, it is important to put the rights of the people ahead of debt servicing.

According to [Eurodad](#) (European Network of Debt and Development): “debt cancellation is needed for countries to fight the pandemic, face the challenges of climate change and pursue a green and inclusive recovery... climate justice will not be possible without economic and debt justice. And debt justice won’t be possible without environmental and climate justice.”

Climate and Debt

- Climate-induced loss and damage is an important driver of debt – existing debt makes it more difficult for that country to respond to emergency needs. They face pre-existing debt and costs of reconstruction.
- During the past decade, developed countries have been providing climate finance as loans. This fuels debt crisis and reduces the country’s ability to fiscal stability.
- Countries most vulnerable to climate change have to pay higher interest rates, because of their climate vulnerabilities.
- Countries struggling to repay their unsustainable debts, will try to exploit its natural resources, including fossil fuel, mining or forests in order to increase revenues through exports to repay debts. This in turn contributes to further climate change, especially desertification.
- The countries in the global south need climate finance to deal with loss and damage after a climate disaster, but most of the climate finance they receive is for mitigation and adaptation.

Climate Finance

Developed countries have committed to mobilize

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European Network of Debt and Development (Eurodad)

up to \$100 billion per year by 2025 to deal with the climate challenges countries in the global south face. Climate Finance is part of the reparations for the huge climate debt owed by governments, elites and corporation of rich industrialized countries. It is an obligation of ‘developed countries’ to “developing countries.” Why? Social movements see climate finance as a way of restituting the climate debt that the global north owes to global south. “Climate

debt calls for a systemic change, a change that includes restitution and reparation for the debt owed by global north to the global south, built in the colonial past and involving neo-colonial dynamics. Climate debt is not just about climate finance; it is about ecological restoration, ending extractivism, and shifting to new modes of production, distribution and consumption.”

How to tackle the interlinkages between debt and climate crisis:

- Recognition of climate debt that the global north owes to global south, that leads to reparations, delivery of climate finance obligations and debt cancellation, ecological restoration, phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies, ending extractivism, decarbonized modes of production, distribution and consumption.
- Urgent delivery of new and additional climate finance beyond the unfulfilled \$100 billion per year target that is responsive to the climate mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage needs of communities in the global south.
- An automatic mechanism for debt payments suspension, debt cancellation and debt restructuring, covering public and private lenders in the aftermath of extreme climate events.
- Lenders and IFIs (International Financial Institutions) should take urgent action to implement ambitious and unconditional cancellation of unsustainable and illegitimate debts.
- Review the approach to debt sustainability by governments and international organizations

EURODAD document: [Climate Emergency: What’s debt got to do with it?](#)

Healthy planet *continued from page 1*

the generations to come.”

The event provided leaders from 150 countries, 1,000 stakeholders, 5,000 in-person participants with 300 youth, and around 136,000 online participants to draw on 50 years of multilateral environmental action to achieve a better future for people and planet. The weight of the issues the global community is confronting created fresh thinking among the participants to focus on collective wellbeing. The conference created pathways to rebuild trust in multilateralism and create new systems of engagement. It garnered support for a universal recognition of a human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, to explore rights of nature, to mainstream alternative voices and solutions, and ideas to enhance the voices and engagement of youth, women, indigenous peoples and local communities in decision making around sustainability transitions. The report, “[Charting a Youth Vision for a Just and Sustainable Future](#)” is a result of the intergenerational conversations, which were a key part of the conference.

Environmental justice was a common theme for the conference. SDG12-sustainable consumption production is critical to environmental efforts and it must become a global movement. Sustainable consumption is not limited to over-consumption; it is also about under-consumption: the billions who do not have access to energy, food, housing, etc.

At Stockholm+50, there was no pressure for a politically negotiated outcome document. This provided an opportunity to create an [action agenda](#) that can serve as ethical and moral guidance for the future, for environmental issues affect all humanity. Climate action requires a movement toward effective and coherent systems of global governance.

The outcome of the conference was the [Stockholm+50 Agenda for Action, Renewal and Trust](#). The agenda provides ethical and moral guidance for the future.

1. Place human wellbeing at the center of a healthy planet and prosperity for all—a healthy planet is a pre-requisite for peaceful, cohesive and prosperous societies.
2. Recognize and implement the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, through fulfilling the vision articulated in principle 1 of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration.
3. Adopt system wide change in the way our current

economic system works to contribute to a healthy planet, through defining and adopting new measures of progress and human wellbeing.

4. Strengthen national implementation of existing commitments for a healthy planet.
5. Align public and private financial flows with environmental, climate and sustainable development commitments.
6. Accelerate system-wide transformations of high impact sectors, such as good, energy, water, buildings and construction, manufacturing and mobility, through policies to promote circularity, resource efficiency, regenerative production approaches and nature-based solutions in value chains.
7. Rebuild relationships of trust for strengthened cooperation and solidarity – developed countries taking leadership to promote sustainability transitions, capacity building and technology transfer to developing countries to implement internationally agreed environmental agreements. including honoring the commitment to mobilize \$100 billion every year for climate finance.
8. Reinforce and reinvigorate the multilateral system – through and effective rules-based multilateral system that supports countries in delivering on their national and global commitments.
9. Recognize intergenerational responsibility as a cornerstone of sound policy making through engaging with the [Stockholm+50 Global Youth Task Force Policy Paper](#)—the importance of building the capacity of young people.
10. Take forward the Stockholm+50 outcomes, through reinforcing and reenergizing the ongoing international processes, including the global framework for biodiversity, protection of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction, and the development of a new plastics convention.

[Watch: Stockholm +50 Webinars](#)

A four-part #GGKP webinar series, “The Road to Stockholm+50,” convened sustainability champions from governments, IGOs, NGOs, civil society, and the private sector to exchange insights on relevant themes. The series included sessions on inclusive growth and prosperity through climate action, green recovery and resilience, the transition from climate commitments to action, and reflections on how the world should move forward post-meeting.



CSW66: Commission on the Status of Women

Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies was the priority theme of the [66th Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW66\)](#), which took place from March 14–25, 2022.

Climate change, environmental degradation and disasters impact women girls differently—they are 14 times more likely than men are to die during a disaster. Disasters affect women and girls differently than men and boys due to pre-existing gender inequalities. The lower the socioeconomic group, the greater the vulnerability, particularly people in developing countries and Small Island Developing States. In 2020, disasters caused 30.7 million new displacements. Domestic violence, sexual exploitation and human trafficking tend to increase during disasters.

Farmers are most vulnerable to climate/environmental degradation. Women are responsible for 50 to 80 percent of world food production but own less than 20 percent of land. In many countries, culture, tradition and laws deny women, particularly widows, land rights and titles; without secure ownership of family land, they cannot engage in climate mitigation efforts.

Climate change threatens our planet with erratic rainfall, rising sea levels, increased drought and intensive fires affecting the livelihoods of the poorest and forcing them to migrate. According to World Bank estimates, 216 million people will be internal climate

migrants by 2050, and 80 percent of those displaced by climate change would be women.

On the health front, women are more vulnerable to the increasing air and water pollution; disease and mortality during climate change disasters. Pregnant, postpartum, elderly and disabled women are at a greater risk. Most of the world's 1.2 billion poor people, two-thirds of whom are women, live in water-scarce countries and do not have access to safe and reliable supplies of water. Women and girls shoulder responsibility for the household water supply.

Indigenous people are 6.2 percent of the global population, yet they protect 80 percent of the world's remaining biodiversity. They are frontline communities in the climate crisis because of their customary reliance on nature for subsistence living, health and economic livelihood. Indigenous women safeguard and transmit traditional knowledge about sustainable environment management to the next generation.

The [agreed conclusion of CSW66](#) has highlighted the current concerns and challenges and provides recommendations to member states for implementation. Like all UN decisions, the implementation of the recommendations will depend on the political will of each country.

The Commission is “deeply concerned that all women and girls, particularly in developing countries and

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Small Island developing States, are disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters are disproportionately exposed to risk and increased loss of livelihoods during and in the aftermath of disasters.” These have increased the vulnerability and inequality, which affect the enjoyment of human rights and wellbeing of women, and girls. There is a recognition of the importance of the concept of “climate justice” while taking action to address climate change.

The Commission is concerned and recognizes:

- The frequency and intensity of disasters resulting in loss of homes, livelihoods, water scarcity, destruction and damage to schools, health facilities, transportation systems, and the displacement of women and girls and their families and communities.
- The challenges women and girls face during forced and prolonged displacement – separation from support networks, homelessness, increased risk of violence, including sexual and gender based violence, reduced access to employment, education and essential healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health-care services and psychosocial support.
- The need for the inclusive participation and contribution of all women and girls, older women, widows, indigenous women and girls, local communities, youth, volunteers, migrants, academia, etc., in all forums and processes related to disaster risk reduction.
- The major contributions of civil society organizations, especially women’s young women’s, girls’ youth-led, grassroots and community based organization, rural, indigenous and feminist groups, women human rights defenders, women journalists and media professionals and trade unions, in promoting and protecting the human rights of all women and girls...
- That violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment in private and public spaces, schools, the world of work and digital space impedes participation and decision-making in climate change policies and programs.
- The disruption caused by climate change and disasters to education systems across the world,

often keeping girls and young women out of school and limiting access to education.

- The right to highest attainable standard of physical and mental health is foundational to building resilience of all women and girls.
- The disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work that women and girls undertake and how these are exasperated by climate change and disasters and limits women’s ability to participate in decision making processes and take up leadership positions...

The Commission urges governments at all levels, and invites civil society, especially women’s organizations, youth-led organizations, feminist groups and faith-based organizations to take the following actions:

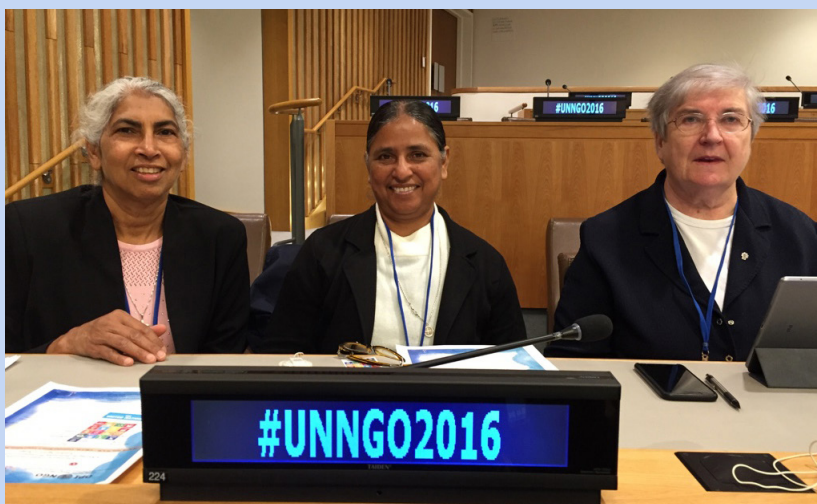
Strengthen normative, legal and regulatory frameworks:

- To fully implement existing commitments and obligations with regard to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls and the full and equal enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination of any kind;
- Ratify the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the Optional Protocols thereto (United States and Somalia have not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child);
- Promote and protect the rights of all women and girls for the enjoyment of clean, healthy and sustainable environment and adopt policies and programs to benefit from these rights;
- Eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls in the context of climate change... in relation to land tenure security and access to, ownership of and control over land, and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, new technology and financial services;
- Integrate gender perspectives into the design, funding, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs on climate change, environmental degradation and disaster risk reduction policies and programs;
- Recognize and promote awareness about the disproportionate and distinct effects of climate change and disasters on women and girls, in

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Celebrating 25 Years at the United Nations

The Sisters of Charity Federation received NGO status at the United Nations in 1997. The federation hosted a virtual prayer June 15, recognizing the dedication and commitment of the four NGO representatives and congregational NGO liaisons over the past 25 years. [Watch video](#) that was shared during the online event.



CSW66 *continued from page 8*

particular those facing violence, discrimination and displacement, harmful practices including child, early and forced marriage, insecurity in land tenure, income and food, and ensure that policies and programs reflect these impacts and take targeted action to strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacities of all women and girls;

- Ensure the full, equal, effective and meaningful participation, representation and leadership of women at all levels in relevant climate change and risk reduction decision making bodies and processes;
- Promote the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of young women and adolescent girls;
- Protect and promote the rights of all women and girls with disabilities, ensuring their meaningful participation in gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive design, management and implementation of climate change disaster risk reduction policies and programs;

Expanding gender-responsive finance:

- Increase the gender-responsiveness of investment in climate change and disaster policies and programs;
- Reminding developed countries to implement their commitment to official development assistance – 0.7 percent of their gross national income to developing countries...to help achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and

girls in the context of climate change... policies and programs;

Enhancing gender statistics and data disaggregated by sex:

- Collect, analyze, disseminate and use data and statistics to inform the design, implementation and tracking of climate change and disaster risk reduction policies and programs;
- Support and fund research and analysis to better understand the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters on women and girls, including in relation to child, early and forced marriage, trafficking in persons, paid and unpaid care and domestic work, health and education, food production, water and sanitation, violence against women and girls. Determine the linkages between the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls and climate change in order to inform policies and programs and to assess women's abilities to cope with and adapt to climate change.

Fostering a gender-responsive just transition:

- Protect and promote the right to work and the rights at work of all women and ensure the equal access of women to decent work and quality jobs in all sectors. Eliminate occupational segregation, discriminatory social norms, and gender stereotypes and violence and sexual harassment; support transition from informal to formal work in all sectors; ensure equal pay for work of equal value; access to sustainable livelihoods in the context of a just transition of the workforce.

The Plastic Challenge: Need for a Plastic Treaty

Plastic production increased from 2 million tons in 1950 to 348 million tons in 2017, and it is expected to double in capacity by 2049. The impact of plastic production and pollution on the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution is a catastrophe in the making.

Our commitments to “Refuse, Reuse, and Recycle” have not made a dent in stopping plastics accumulating in landfills, rivers and the oceans. Plastic has become an omnipresent threat to public health, livelihoods and the environment. Annually, around 11 million tons of plastic waste is flowing into our oceans. By 2050, there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean. The total plastic mass represents twice all living mammals, with 80 percent of all plastics ever produced still in the environment.

- It is invading marine habitats, poisoning marine life damaging marine ecosystem, leading to biodiversity loss; more than 800 marine and coastal species are affected through ingestion, entanglement and other dangers.
- Plastic waste in the ocean affect the livelihoods of fishing communities—there is less fish to catch and discarded fishing nets entangle their boats.

- Plastic waste is clogging the drains in many cities and towns are causing flooding. The stagnant water becomes a breeding ground for water-borne diseases.
- In rural areas, people who raise cows and goats for income generation are also impacted—their livestock become sick or die after consuming plastic found in grazing fields.
- Exposure to plastics can harm human health, potentially affecting fertility, hormonal, metabolic and neurological activity. Open burning of plastics contributes to air pollution. According to the World Wildlife Fund, “an average person eats five grams of plastic waste a week, equivalent to a credit card.” “Up to a million people die from plastic pollution every year,” reports the Institute of Development Studies.

What is happening on the recycling front? Not all the plastics we deposit in the recycle bin are recycled; the recycle icon on an item does not necessarily mean it is recyclable. The plastics industry created the icon, and there is no oversight on how it can be used. The world produces around 348 million tons of plastic waste, and only 9 percent of it is recycled. The rest accumulates in landfills or the natural environment. Over time, these materials break down into microplastics, easily entering into the human food chain, freshwater systems and air.

How do we tackle the plastic menace, when economies both large and small are relying on plastic to drive their economic growth without considering the resulting environmental and public health damage? Until now, the Basel Convention was the only global, legally binding instrument to address plastic pollution. It regulated the transboundary movement of plastic waste and better management of plastic pollution.

Multilateral and intergenerational cooperation is needed to tackle plastic pollution. There is need for a shift in production, consumption and waste management. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report, “[From Pollution to Solution](#),” states, “We have the knowhow; we need the political will and urgent action by gov-



Photo by [Dustan Woodhouse](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labor

The fifth Global [Conference on the Elimination of Child Labor](#)

took place in Durban, South Africa May 15–20, 2022. The conference was held to assess the progress of SDG target 8.7 “Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labor in all its forms.” It also discussed good practices, identified gaps and urgent measures needed to accelerate the elimination of child labor and forced labor.

The conference took place at critical time in the fight against child labor, where its progress was threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflict, food insecurity, climate emergencies and other humanitarian crises. It is shown in the increase of child labor during the period of 2016–2020 by 8.9 million, and that too among children aged 5-11. According to the [2020 Global Estimates of Child Labor](#), 160 million girls and boys remain in child labor, half of whom are in hazardous work; 112 million are in agriculture and the recruitment of child soldiers continues.

(According to the report of the special representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, more than 8,000 children were killed or maimed due to conflict, 6,310 were recruited and used in combat, and nearly 3,500 children were abducted. The offenders are Myanmar’s military, Congo’s army, Syria’s government forces and pro-government militias, including nonstate groups like, Islamic State, al-Qaida, Boko Haram and al-Shabab.)

Some of the key topics taken up during at the Conference are:

- Elimination of child labor as a right of children and a condition for positive labor market performance with a human centered approach (education, skills development, life-long learning and school-to-decent work transition, depending on



age group);

- High prevalence of child labor in agriculture which is closely linked to poverty, informality and family survival strategies;
- The formalization of informal economy and the creation of decent work;
- The need for additional resources and targeted policies addressing the root causes of child labor and forced labor and the provision of adequate funding;
- The challenge of COVID-19 reverting years of progress in the fight against child labor and child trafficking.

The conference concluded with the adoption of the [Durban Call to Action](#), which includes commitments in six areas. [Watch video](#)

1. Making decent work a reality for adults and youth above minimum age for work
2. Ending child labor in agriculture
3. Preventing and eliminating child labor and forced labor through data-driven policy and programmatic responses
4. Realizing children’s right to free, compulsory, quality and inclusive education
5. Achieving universal access to social protection
6. Increasing financing and international cooperation for the elimination of child labor

UN Member States have committed to take 49 immediate and effective measures to implement this Call to Action.

Plastic Challenge *continued from page 10*

ernments to tackle the mounting crisis.”

[Global Plastics Treaty: The United Nations Environment Assembly](#), the world’s highest environmental decision-making body, held from Feb. 28–March 2, 2022, in Nairobi agreed to negotiate an internationally legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution and establish a science-policy panel on chemicals and waste to prevent pollution. The Assembly agreed to set up an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to draft the legally binding agreement by 2024. The treaty will consider the full lifecycle of plastic, from fossil fuel extraction to plastic production and consumption to post-consumer waste, to cover all plastic pollution in any environment or ecosystem.

The Executive Director of UNEP will convene a meeting to prepare for the INC’s work and determine its timetable. Governments must decide on the rules for the negotiation, such as definition of “plastic.” The UNEP will convene a forum by the end of 2022 to share knowledge on best practices in different parts of the world. Finally, it will convene a diplomatic conference to adopt the INC’s outcome and open the treaty for signature by national governments. This agreement to end plastic pollution, through a legally binding global treaty is an important step that can contribute to the climate transition and protect oceans, the environment and biodiversity.

How do we hold our governments and the private sector accountable? We cannot leave the negotiations to the governments alone. We need multi-stakeholder engagement on tackling the whole lifecycle of plas-

tics—from fossil fuel extraction to disposal. At the every stage of the negotiations, civil society need to make sure they are part of the discussions to create strong legally binding commitments; keeping oil and gas in the ground; protecting climate; holding countries accountable for managing their own waste and mandating governments working to ensue just transitions for workers.

Opportunities for renewed advocacy to phase out fuel are numerous in the context of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. Commitments from COP26 to reduce carbon through phasing down fossil fuel are overlooked in the scramble to produce more oil and gas to fire up the engines of “development” everywhere. This return to business as usual will have huge repercussions on investing in renewable energy and innovation.

Another area for advocacy is fossil fuel subsidies and investment in clean energy. In 2020, global fossil subsidies were \$5.9 trillion, and this is expected to increase. (Fossil fuel subsidies are measures taken by governments that artificially lower the price of coal, oil or natural gas; production subsidies—tax breaks or direct payments that reduce the cost of producing fossil fuels and consumption subsidies—energy price cuts for consumers, such as setting fixed prices at gas stations.) At COP26, countries agreed to accelerate efforts to phase-out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies. Many countries have failed to reform fossil fuel subsidies, for it leads to increased prices. According to [The Energy Policy Tracker](#), since 2020, the world’s major economies are spending more to fund fossil fuels through new amended policies than clean energy. The world of fossil fuel subsidies lacks transparency and accountability.

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Upcoming UN Meetings:

[Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#)

Aug. 1–26, 2022

[77th Session of the UN General Assembly](#)

Opens on Sept. 13, 2022

[Transforming Education Summit](#)

Sept. 19, 2022

[COP 27 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt](#)

Nov. 7–18, 2022

[COP 15 on Biodiversity in Montreal, Canada](#)

Dec. 5–17, 2022