

***Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against  
Women on Draft General Recommendation No. 35 on the Gender-related  
Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction in a Changing Climate***



Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre (GPS) welcomes the committee's decision to draft CEDAW general recommendation (GR) no. 35 on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate and the opportunity to provide a submission to this process.

**Title:**

The title of the general recommendation highlights disaster risk reduction as the focus of the GR, however the text of the draft recommendation often refers to the full cycle of disasters; risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery. We recommend that the title of the GR be amended and that the GR provide guidance that extends to the varying stages of disasters, given the interconnectedness of each stage and the fact that progression through stages is often not linear.

**I) Introduction:**

There is an inconsistency in paragraph 4 in regards to referencing the increase in morbidity for women and girls as a result of disasters. The paragraph lays out some of the causes of the increased mortality rate for women and girls in disasters, however there is no link to increased morbidity<sup>1</sup>. Morbidity is mentioned only at the end of the paragraph in regards to gender responsive disaster planning.

Dignity is not addressed in the introductory section looking at the gendered impacts and gendered responses of disasters and a changing climate. The right to life with dignity is recognised in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>2</sup> and there is a need for specific measures to preserve dignity in times of disasters. There is a gender specific significance to dignity related to the challenges to sexual and reproductive rights in disasters and increased prevalence of gender based violence. Paragraph 4 highlights the

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<sup>1</sup> Neumayer, Eric and Plümer, Thomas (2007) The gendered nature of natural disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981–2002 *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97 (3). 551-566. ISSN 0004-5608

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 16 December 1966, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 993, p. 3, available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx> [accessed 15 January 2017]

impacts of disasters and climate change on women and girls as well as some of the necessary considerations in risk reduction, we strongly recommend a reference to the preservation of dignity is included here.

## **II) Objective and Scope:**

It is unclear whether the scope of the general recommendation is restricted only to climate related disasters or to encompass all natural disasters. We recommend that given there is no other general recommendation that adequately covers the dimensions of natural disasters that GR. 35 also covers natural disasters that fall outside the dimensions of 'climate related' disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis.

Paragraph 10 highlights a narrow scope that is not consistently adhered to throughout the GR. The narrow context of new hazards and disaster risks that have emerged as a result of a changing climate are often difficult to clearly distinguish from other risks and hazards. The scale or intensity of disasters may be increased as a result of a changing climate and the greater impact and the specific cause of the disaster can be difficult to identify<sup>3</sup>. Broadening the scope slightly to encompass disasters and/or natural disasters including the effects of a changing climate would more accurately reflect the content of the general recommendation

The GR states that it does not cover the gender related dimensions of climate change adaptation and mitigation in general, however mitigation and adaptation are inexplicably linked to disaster risk reduction. We would suggest that the scope is more specific in including mitigation and adaptation as they relate to disasters and risk reduction.

## **IV) C. Accountability and access to justice:**

The draft GR does not adequately address the significant risk of law enforcement and justice mechanisms breaking down or becoming overwhelmed beyond capacity during a disaster. In large scale disasters there is a significant risk of disruptions to the capacity of justice systems to function at both the national level and district or provincial level. The GR should acknowledge that there is the potential for a significant gap in access to justice for women and girls, particularly noting the impact for survivors of gender based violence. There are several mitigation and response measures that could be highlighted here such as mobile courts, integrated or one-stop-shop police stations and community policing posts.

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<sup>3</sup> IPCC, 2012 Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation: Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/special-reports/srex/SREX\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/special-reports/srex/SREX_Full_Report.pdf) [accessed 15 January 2017]

## **VI) Thematic Areas of Concern:**

### **A. Health**

We acknowledge the committee's efforts to highlight sexual and reproductive health and the recognition that there may be significant differences in vulnerability to disease that are gender-based. It should be noted however that these gender based differences are often a result of existing inequality within a society. Further to the gendered differences in vulnerability to disease, this section should also acknowledge that it is often the expectation that women and girls be the primary care givers to the sick, and that this could place an excessive burden on women and girls in times of both pandemics as well as other natural disasters with an adverse impact on their health and wellbeing.

### **H. Gender Based Violence against Women.**

This section does not reference the potential of natural disasters to prompt negative coping mechanisms such as transactional sex and child or forced marriage. These are forms of gender based violence and a significant risk in natural disasters and should be addressed in risk reduction, preparedness as well as in response and recovery efforts.

### **I. Migration and forced displacement**

The migration and forced displacement component of the GR does not address the issue of women and girls left behind in the community or country of origin when there is significant migration or forced displacement in response to natural disasters or climate change. This is significant as it can lead to a sharp increase in female headed households, increased economic vulnerability and have impacts on housing and property rights.

## **General Comments**

### **Intersection between natural disasters, climate change and conflict**

Whilst the GR acknowledges in section III) the intersection with other relevant international frameworks, the GR should also acknowledge the international frameworks applicable related to conflict. It is often difficult to distinguish and attribute the impacts of disasters in conflict zones and disasters can exacerbate both the impacts and source of the conflict<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> True, J. 2016 Women, Peace And Security In Asia Pacific: Emerging Issues In National Action Plans For Women, Peace And Security, UNWOMEN Asia-Pacific <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2016/12/1-nap-jt-for-online-r3.pdf?v=1&d=20161209T065558> [accessed 15 January 2017]

Further to this the effects of climate change have the potential to intensify existing tensions, particularly those related to water and land resources.

### **Gender Equality amongst Disaster Responders**

The GR should also highlight the need for gender equality amongst disaster responders, including national police and armed forces. This is crucial not only due to the vulnerabilities women and girls face in times of disaster, but also to ensure the varying needs of displaced populations are adequately addressed and that economic opportunities are open to women and girls during the recovery phase 4.

### **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

The GR should use inclusive and consistent language throughout to recognise the diversity of gender identities and acknowledge the impact of sexual orientation and gender identity on vulnerability and protective mechanisms in times of disasters. Whilst GR 35 makes some references to sexual orientation and gender identity (Paragraph 67), it is not adequately addressed throughout the recommendation.

### **Opportunity for Transformative Change**

The GR does not adequately highlight the potential for disasters and the changing climate to result in opportunities for transformative change in gender relations and increased economic opportunities for women and girls. The inclusion of the potential economic opportunities associated with disaster recovery in particular should be further highlighted.

### **Terminology**

The GR uses terms such as gender sensitive and gender responsive without distinction between these concepts. Attention should be made to the consistency of language throughout.

The GR uses the term 'gender' inconsistently, whilst acknowledging the gender differentials in the impact of disasters and the importance of intersectionality in some places, in others the GR conflates the term gender with women.

### **Paragraph numbering:**

The numbering of paragraphs is repeated at paragraph 41 and 42. The numbering of paragraphs regresses after 70 to number 65.

### **Expertise of Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre:**

**Monash Gender Peace and Security** is a research centre comprised of policy and community engaged scholars whose research is focused in the field of gender, peace and security. We seek to use our research to inform scholarly debate, policy development and implementation, public understanding about the gendered politics of armed conflict, disasters and the search for peace.

**Hannah Jay**, is the Senior Research Coordinator for Monash GPS and a gender and GBV in emergencies specialist. Hannah has previously worked for a number of UN agencies and International organisations. She has also worked specifically on the intersection of gender, protection, disaster risk management and climate change in the Pacific region.

**Jacqui True** is Professor of Politics & International Relations, Director of Monash GPS and an Australian Research Council Future Fellow at Monash University, Australia.

Professor True specialises in gender and international relations, women, peace and security, and violence against women. Her over 100 publications include journal articles on gender mainstreaming and global governance and feminist methodologies.

Her current research is focused on understanding the political economy of post-conflict violence against women and the patterns of systemic sexual and gender-based violence in Asia Pacific conflict-affected countries. She has conducted research on human rights and political economy for governments and international organisations including the United Nations Office for the High Commission of Human Rights, the UN Department of Political Affairs, UN Women, the European Commission and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.