### Check against delivery

**Statement by REEM ALSALEM**

**SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS, ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

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*Chairperson,*

*Distinguished delegates,*

It is an honor to address you today in my capacity as UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, and to present my first thematic report to the General Assembly.

I present this report against the backdrop of a continued global pushback against women’s rights and gender equality. Attempts to control what women and girls say, think and wear, as well as to deny them access to sexual and reproductive rights is on the rise. It is therefore no surprise that we are lagging behind in the implementation of and progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Since preparations began for my report earlier this year, the wrath of mother nature has continued to wreak havoc, with ever increasing natural disasters threatening lives across the globe, and – to quote UN Secretary General Guterres – as we face the future, the impacts of climate change are “heading into uncharted territories of destruction”.

Collectively, we have come to better appreciate what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had already pointed out, namely that climate change acts as a threat multiplier and its impacts are felt more severely by those who are already marginalized, due to pre-existing inequalities and discrimination.

In July 2022, the UN General Assembly built on the landmark resolution (48/13) of the Human Rights Council on the right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. It codified the recognition of the international community of the negative human rights consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, noting that these consequences are felt more acutely by women and girls.

Though relevant disaggregated data must still be rigorously collected, existing data already indicates that the impact of climate change is undeniably gendered and therefore experienced differently.

In those countries most affected by climate change and environmental degradation, most, if not all aspects of the lives of women and girls has been significantly impacted, as well as the enjoyment of the fundamental human rights and freedoms that they are entitled to. Available evidence clearly demonstrates that the impact of climate change aggravates all types of gender-based violence against women and girls.

My report notes that although more women and girls are exposed to violence, their access to effective assistance mechanisms, including social protection, psychological and sexual and reproductive health services, is severely impeded.

In the aftermath of natural disasters, the risks and experiences of physical violence are particularly pronounced, mainly for those who are displaced and/or in emergency shelters, whereby a breakdown of law-and-order curbs access to reporting and protection mechanisms. The loss of livelihoods and limited resources tied to the aftereffects of large-scale natural disasters or slow-onset environmental degradation force women and girls in different parts of the world into sexual exploitation in exchange for food and natural resources, including water or fuel from common areas.

Furthermore, water scarcity from droughts pushes women and girls to travel longer distances into unfamiliar areas or without usually available safeguards, such as travelling in a group or during daylight.

Sexual violence is also rife when farmers, vendors, landowners, or authorities coerce women into transactional sex in exchange for food, essential items or access to land for food production.

The extractive industry, energy and production-related ventures, commercial logging and extractive energy sourcing have had negative, gendered and often violent consequences. The vulnerable situation creates scope for opportunistic sexual violence, for which there is no or limited accountability.

The risk of trafficking for women and girls can increase. Family separation and orphaning are additional risk factors for girls.

As conflicts over land intensify, physical threats against women also increase, with the intention of forcing them off land where they reside, work or to strip away the land they are entitled to.

While physical violence is the most tangible form of violence women and girls experience, psychological and other forms of violence are also well documented and should not be ignored.

There have been reports of women and girls experiencing depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and post-traumatic stress disorder as a direct or indirect result of climate change. Reduced privacy can and should also be understood as a form of psychological violence that becomes more prevalent.

Slow-onset climate events exacerbate violence in homes, where domestic violence manifests as intimate partner violence.

Overall, climate change exacerbates gender and intergenerational poverty, which is a form of grave economic violence. Climate impacts make household tasks more labor-intensive and difficult to complete, which extends women’s economic burden and decreases their ability to achieve financial independence. Where climate impacts tend to impel outmigration among men, women need to earn income, in addition to performing their existing responsibilities.

Climate change worsens women’s economic burden and “time poverty” and exposes them to unsafe forms of employment. Economic stress, loss of livelihoods and heightened food insecurity promote negative coping mechanisms, including forced marriage and harmful traditional practices, including the premature withdrawal of girls from education.

The report also references some of the groups that are particularly at risk of violence such as women environmental human rights defenders, indigenous women and girls defending territories and communities, women of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, older women, women with disabilities, and women in poverty and those forcefully displaced.

The report also touches on the extent to which individual States and multi-stakeholder processes have factored in the issue of violence against women and girls. As I note in the report, there is an increased reference to gender as a cross-cutting issue in national plans and commitments. However, women are generally referred to as a vulnerable group, as opposed to actors with agency, and girls are hardly ever acknowledged. The States’ implementation and reporting of gender-responsive initiatives continue to be limited.

It is also concerning that despite women and women-led organizations often acting as first responders during a crisis and leading with strong activism, women and girls are largely absent from policy and decision-making.

With conversations around loss and damage and accountability for the climate crisis faltering, there is even more to be done to deliberately incorporate a gender-sensitive approach for tackling the climate crisis and its consequences, which is long overdue.

Yet, and as challenging as these discussions are, I urge you not to set aside the clear and cumulative effect that the climate crisis is having on women and girls, and not to relegate it to the status of an “afterthought”. In fact, for any approach or response to the climate crisis to be effective, the gendered impact must be placed at its center.

Global processes that govern the way the international community addresses climate change, such as the “three Rio Conventions,” need to also apply a more robust and transformative gender lens to all their undertakings. In this respect, there is also ample space to highlight climate-related security risks in the women and peace and security agenda.

In conclusion, this is no time to compromise on the drive to address the multiple and underlying causes of gender-based violence or weaken the commitment to an all-society approach, as the causes and consequences of violence are exacerbated by climate change and environmental degradation.

Thank you!