***Response to the questionnaire in relation to Human Rights Council resolution 47/24 on human rights and climate change:***

**Addressing The Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change on Women and Birthing People of African Descent**

Human activities, such as deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels, have substantially contributed to dramatic changes in the global climate over the past several decades.1 These changes have resulted in an increase in air pollution, extreme temperature changes, and natural disasters across the globe—such as heatwaves, droughts, tropical cyclones, and flooding.2 Research has demonstrated that climate change not only has harmful environmental and economic impacts, but it also has harmful physiological, mental, and physical health impacts.1,2 Although climate change affects everyone’s health, these adverse health impacts are most amplified amongst women and birthing people of African descent.

Climate change disproportionately impacts women and birthing people of African descent because of the effects of racism, anti-Blackness, colonialism, capitalism, and the patriarchy. These structural oppressions manifest both indirectly and directly in the context of the climate crisis. For example, women and birthing persons of African descent tend to make up a majority of the local food production (i.e., agriculture and fishing) and tend to live in communities that have a higher reliance on these natural resources to sustain their livelihoods—especially in Afro-indigenous communities.3 Thus, when the instability of the environment inevitably depletes their crops or access to certain wildlife, they not only lose access to income, but they also lose access to resources that sustain their households.4-6 This economic vulnerability as a consequence of climate change is further exacerbated by the social structural oppressions that prevent these women and birthing persons from having other means of income. Thus, these factors indirectly and disproportionately expose women and birthing people of African descent to extreme poverty and health issues such as dehydration, nutrient deficiencies or even malnutrition.1,5-7

The indirect and direct effects of climate change on the health of women and birthing people of African descent are also reflected in migration and displacement. As climate-induced natural disasters increase and economic opportunities dwindle, women and birthing people of African descent are forced to migrate to other parts of their countries or the world more broadly, to sustain their livelihoods.4,8,9 However, this forced displacement dramatically reduces their access to reproductive and maternal healthcare services, which disproportionately impacts their reproductive health and well-being.4,8-10For example, when the devastating 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck the southwestern region of Haiti on August 14th, 2021, reproductive and maternal health services were severely disrupted and led to many Haitian women and birthing people seeking healthcare in the few facilities that were left standing.11 The limited access to these health services not only increased their exposure to general health issues such as infection and tetanus, but it also exposed these Haitian women and birthing people to an increased risk of maternal and newborn health complications as well as deaths.11

Furthermore, this displacement also dramatically increases their exposure to gender-based violence (both within humanitarian settings and in route to their destination), human trafficking, and contemporary forms of slavery.12 This violence and exploitation can uniquely expose women and birthing people to physical and mental health consequences such as HIV, unintended pregnancies, fistulas, PTSD, and depression.9-10,12 Most importantly, while these adverse health consequences affect all women and birthing people, they are most pronounced for those women and birthing people of African descent across the globe.12,13

Even if their means of income are not severely impacted and forced displacement does not occur, the exposure to extreme temperatures, air pollution, and weather changes also adversely impacts the health of women and birthing people of African descent. Research has demonstrated that birthing people are extremely vulnerable to heat and respiratory illnesses which can lead to congenital abnormalities, preterm birth, low birth weight, and stillbirths.14,15 They are also more vulnerable to infections, such as malaria and Zika, both of which have disproportionately impacted the health of women, birthing people, and their children in many African nations and countries across the Americas.1,14-17

Given the myriad of these unique and devastating social, economic, and health impacts, there is an urgent need to not only find sustainable solutions to address climate change, but to also ensure that women and birthing people of African descent are protected and included in these efforts. Gender justice movements, particularly youth movements, are leading the charge and demanding change.18 For example, coalitions such as the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Climate Justice (SRHR & CJ) Coalition and the Feminist Green New Deal Coalition provide the space for policymakers, community members, and other stakeholders to come together and drive the policy change that is inclusive and incorporates historical accountability.19-20 These coalitions are focused on shifting power to resist exploitation, to reshape the world in a more equitable way, and reimagine ways to heal what has been damaged by patriarchal, colonialist, racist, and capitalist systems. The time has come for large corporations and governments to be held accountable and to begin making large investments that will help address the climate crisis.

Furthermore, there needs to be an investment in localization; communities know best how to address climate change in their spaces and should be in every room when policies are being drafted and implemented. For example, Sierra Leone has appointed their first Chief Heat Officer, Eugenia Kargbo.21 She has stated that she was driven to take this position in order to make her home safer and cooler for her family and her community.21 Her position is a perfect example of how our collective vision for climate justice must include resourcing and supporting women and birthing people of African descent to lead resistance and reimagine solutions against the unequal effects of the climate crisis. Moreover, in considering community-driven solutions, it is also imperative that we uplift and listen to Indigenous communities, as they are defenders of the land and hold so much knowledge that should be included in all climate change policies.3, 20

Ultimately, addressing the enormity and urgency of climate change’s disproportionate impact on women and birthing people of African descent will require a global collaboration that is rooted in the promotion of human rights and reproductive justice.

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