**41st session of the Human Rights Council**

**Panel discussion on women’s rights and climate change: climate action, good practices and lessons learned**

**Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet**

28 June 2019

Distinguished President of the Council,

Dear Mary,

Distinguished panellists

Excellencies,

Colleagues,

I am pleased to open this panel discussion on women’s rights and climate change. I note, in particular, the presence of the representative of Fiji, a country with a long record of climate leadership and valuable experience in this area.

I want to emphasise, at the outset of this panel, the determination of my Office to do our utmost to prevent and mitigate the threat of climate change to human rights – and perhaps even to a human future.

Across the planet, the climate crisis is stripping people of their rights and identity, and even, in some cases, their homes, their countries and their lives.

And within this context, there are a number of clear links between climate change and the effective enjoyment of women’s rights.

To begin with, climate change has specific adverse impacts on women and girls.

During extreme weather events, women are more likely to die than men, due to differences in socio-economic status, and access to information. Women who are pregnant and breastfeeding are subject to food insecurity resulting from climate change. Saltier drinking water, because of rising sea-levels, may cause premature births, and maternal and newborn deaths. The economic stress induced by disasters and climate change can lead to cases of child, early and forced marriages, as a coping strategy. And intensified threats to land, water, species and livelihoods profoundly affect women, who work the land or rely on ecosystems for their families' subsistence.

The report submitted by my Office, in line with the Council's resolution 38/4, finds that entrenched discrimination intensifies the impacts of climate change on women –particularly when they are also subjected to discrimination as members of marginalised communities. The report describes many damaging outcomes, including a woman's right to health, food security, livelihoods and involuntary displacement as areas become uninhabitable.

Last year, more than 17 million people became internally displaced, in 144 countries, due to natural disasters and climate change. That estimate, by the International Displacement Monitoring Centre, does not include people who may have crossed international borders. It is also 60% more than the number of people forced to leave their home by conflict.

Among these millions of displaced people, today and in the future, women and girls will be especially exposed to threats of gender-based violence, including human trafficking and other violations.

As CEDAW has pointed out in its General Recommendation number 37, it is clearly urgent to take action to mitigate and adapt to the direct and indirect adverse impacts of climate change on women and girls.

At the same time, women and girls have much to contribute to climate action.

This may particularly be the case for women from marginalised communities, who live in the most precarious, at-risk areas. Their intimate knowledge of the land and nature-based ecological strategies can be fundamental in the search for solutions that minimise climate harm, improve early warning, and build resilience.

In Chad, for example, Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, a young woman from the Mbororo Fulani community, has joined other indigenous women to set up community management of natural resources – mapping water, in particular, and increasing women’s participation in community decisions.

With all our societies facing changes of immense magnitude, we need the contributions of everyone – and especially those who are dealing with climate change in their daily lives – so we can build good solutions.

The exclusion of half of society from effectively helping to shape policies, including those which respond to climate harms, means that those policies are likely to be less responsive to the specific damage being caused; less effective in protecting communities; and may even deepen the harm being done.

We need to empower women and girls of diverse backgrounds to fully participate as agents of change in preventing and responding to climate harms in their community.

And it is of vital importance that every State address the discrimination which limits women's choices and freedom, the services they can access, and their participation in society.

The country-wide benefits of greater equality for women are potentially transformative. For example, according to a 2011 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization, if women had equal access to finance and resources, their farm yields would rise by 20 to 30 per cent. Between 100 and 150 million people would no longer go hungry. And carbon dioxide emissions could be substantially reduced.

In this context, I note the Human Rights Council's resolution 40/11, in March, declared that "promoting respect, support and protection for the activities of human rights defenders, including women and indigenous human rights defenders", are essential to both human rights and environmental protection.

Violence and threats that are inflicted on many brave environmental human rights defenders can silence those who work in the long-term interest of us all. We need to step up our efforts to protect them – women and men.

Among the activists demonstrating for greater climate action around the world, there are a number of young women. Their commitment and insight deserve to be emulated by many world leaders. As the Secretary-General has said, "This is not solidarity; it’s not generosity. It is enlightened self-interest".

I urge Member States to use the opportunity of today’s discussion to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of climate change on women; to identify opportunities to reduce those impacts and increase women’s participation in policy-making; and to commit to action.

My Office is committed to strengthening our responsiveness to Member States, to support their adoption of human rights based policies, so as to increase the climate resilience of people and communities, especially women.

Thank you.