

Briefing of the
Committee of Permanent Representatives
Thursday, 5 October 2017
Conference Room 4
United Nations Office in Nairobi, Gigiri
2:30p.m. – 3:30p.m.

Statement by the Women Major Group

The Women Major Group submits their statement on their work and contribution to the 2017 UN Environment Assembly, as provided during the briefing on Major Groups held on 5 October 2017.

WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP STATEMENT ON THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES

Thank you chair for this opportunity. My name is **Mary Muia** representing the Women's Major Group.

Comment [Office1]: TBC

We would like to thank the opportunity for enhancing transparency and ensuring that No One is Left Behind. We are ready to support the process to ensure UNEA-3's success and associated outcomes leading to a genuinely 'Pollution Free Planet'.

While noting that the environmental pillar of sustainable development is a key driver for human livelihoods and well-being, different forms of pollution pose a grave threat to human health, especially women and girls. Non-conventional forms of pollution, such as genetic, anti-biotic, nuclear, electromagnetic pollution as well as pollution coming from geo-engineering and other climate related technologies, have not yet been addressed and UNEA-3 bears a responsibility in doing so.

Hence, although we see in the Declaration key issues related to pollution, we believe that it still lacks some of the most pressing ones if the goal of ending pollution in all its forms is to be achieved. Besides, the language in the outcome documents should reflect diversity of all rights holders and stakeholders involved and recognize the importance of each and every one of them as agents of change, including by highlighting the vital role that women from indigenous and local communities have played in reducing and curbing pollution. Yet, most victims from air, water and food pollution continue to be women and girls.

Women's and men's health is affected differently by pollution and we need to understand biological factors and gender roles in order to find solutions. Women and girls are more prone to exposure to chemicals, including persistent and hormone disrupting pollutants which in early years leads to irreversible damage, therefore they need protection. Current research efforts have observed possible correlations between exposures to environmental toxins, such as agrochemicals, and the development of disease and illness, including cancer, reproductive dysfunction, and immunologic and neurologic impairment. Thus, mainstreaming gender in pollution responses is a must.

In the case of air pollution, for instance, around 4 million people die annually, mostly women and girls who spend the most time around the family cook stove fueled with bioenergy — inhaling soot-filled smoke in a brew of other toxic and carcinogenic compounds. When household pollution drifts outside, it releases large quantities of black carbon, a short-lived climate pollutant—making home cook stoves the second largest contributor to black carbon emissions globally, after forests, grasslands and agricultural fires.

It is in this light that the WMG strongly calls for a Resolution to be introduced on Gender and Pollution, as said before, men and women are impacted differently from pollution, and the

international community and other sectors need to understand this so that measures are taken, for instance, by phasing out toxic materials that are known to have serious impacts on children and on women's reproductive ability.

We call for clearer interlinkages from UNEA-3 to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; despite Goal 3.9 on Health & Air pollution failing to specifically mention the gender aspects of this type of pollution, it is clear that achieving a "substantial reduction" of air pollution-related deaths by 2030, requires women's involvement and improvement of their conditions. Goal 3.1 on maternal mortality & 3.2 on neonatal and children mortality also involve gender aspects that have not been clearly spelled out, but that UNEA-3, as an expert agency, can help raise awareness. We expect UNEA-3 to set clear mechanisms for delivering results on SDGs related to pollution and women, and strengthening and enforcing more integrated policies, regulations and laws which are linked to Goal 5 on Gender Equality.

Moreover, we advise that Resolutions should not be formulated in silos, but should take into account the close interlinkages among issues in pollution across ecosystems. For example, soil pollution caused by overdependence on synthetic and fossil-based fertilizers is linked with marine pollution, ocean acidification and eutrophication, and leads to emissions of nitrous oxide which contribute substantially to air pollution. Similarly, the livestock industry is increasingly recognized as a major source of water, air and soil pollution and one of the leading contributors to climate change. We believe that the impacts of pollution on the achievement of some of the SDGs, and its contribution to aggravating development problems that SDGs aim to address, should be tackled in a separate gender-aware Resolution.

We request for a serious commitment to identify and understand the unique way environmental toxins interact in women and girls' bodies and lives; a commitment for countries to understand the health impacts of chemical exposures in women's workplaces; and an interagency review to evaluate the National risk assessment policy and its impact on women's health.

This should be a basis for actionable proposals that will involve the government, private sector, civil society and all sectors, such as a mechanism for participatory and multi-sectoral assessment of technologies to ensure that these will not cause pollution.

Finally, as part of the 9 Major Groups recognized and noting that UNEA-1 & 2 were especially gender blind, we expect that UNEA-3 will address this situation and that UNE will lead the way to future gender-aware UNEA's. Thank you.