



# Action Coalition 4: Feminist Action for Climate Justice

Interlinkages between the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and the work of the Generation Equality Action Coalitions and the Compact for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action

## SUMMARY

The climate crisis is profoundly reshaping our world and threatening the survival of communities, ecosystems and the biosphere. This crisis is a symptom of—and driven by—a social system predicated on patriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism. These interlocking systems of oppression serve to prioritise and value profit over people and planet, placing all forms of life as objects to be owned, colonised, and consumed. Indeed, climate change and environmental degradation are a direct result of colonial pasts and policies, predicated on racial supremacy, that legitimised the plunder of natural resources and human labour as well as reconfiguring borders to maximise profit, with complete disregard for the populations inhabiting those spaces.<sup>1</sup> As a direct extension of these extractive histories, patriarchal and corporate profit-making systems still operate by exploiting the labour of women and girls, as well as other marginalised populations, indifferent to the disproportionate and detrimental impact of their operations on these communities and the environment. Sustainability and peace go hand in hand. A just, fair, and liveable future will not be possible without a radical transformation of society, and the centring of feminist values and feminist peace into climate action is essential to the healing of our planet and the possibility of a sustainable future.

## THE ISSUE

### Background

Unequal access to and distribution of social, economic and ecological resources results in injustice, with direct and indirect links to the causes and consequences of violence and armed conflict, all of which are gendered. Conflict and war fuel environmental degradation such as pollution of air, water and land, and plunder of natural resources, creating a vicious cycle of war economies at the expense of people and planet. Critical to addressing the inextricable link between structural inequalities, gender, and militarism is environmental justice; in other words, recognising and addressing the disproportionate socioeconomic impact of environmental policies and regulations on different populations, including through equal partnership in decision-making spaces. Environmental justice can only be achieved through feminist peace—an understanding that sees security not as predicated on patriarchal norms of weapons and

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Macmillen Voskoboynik. 2018. "To Fix the Climate Crisis, We Must Face Up to Our Imperial Past." <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/to-fix-climate-crisis-we-must-acknowledge-our-imperial-past/>

militarism, but on societal well-being and care. Practices of feminist peace promote the right of all people to live life free from violence, persecution, environmental impacts and economic exploitation.

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## How are armed conflict, militarism, and the climate crisis interlinked?

The adverse impact of climate change and environmental disasters have increasingly been recognised as a direct concern for global peace and security, with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015) highlighting the impacts of climate change as a cross-cutting issue for the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda. The UN Secretary-General's 2020 annual report on WPS addresses climate change and environmental degradation as major drivers of conflict; takes note of the socioeconomic and gendered impacts of climate change and environmental degradation as well as the need to integrate gender analysis into all climate-related policy making; and highlights the role women activists have played in demanding climate justice. The report also underscores the need for linking the WPS agenda with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) to prevent future conflicts and achieve sustainable peace.

Global military activity is a major contributor to and driver of climate change and environmental degradation. Worldwide, governments exploit and destroy large tracts of land and airspace for military activities, particularly in colonised and occupied lands and at the expense of local communities' health, well-being and sovereignty. The U.S. military alone emits more greenhouse gases annually than most medium-sized countries,<sup>2</sup> and yet military emissions have long been omitted from countries reporting to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Comparatively, it has been estimated that the world needs to invest \$50 trillion USD towards a low-carbon transition by 2050 in order to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement,<sup>3</sup> but, as of 2020, only \$10.5 billion USD has been committed to the Green Climate Fund.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, in 2019, global military spending rose three percent to 1.9 trillion U.S. dollars,<sup>5</sup> the largest increase year on year in almost a decade, and states have continued to fuel armed conflict, including through the global arms trade.

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## What is militarism doing to the environment?

The international dependence on the production, research, and development of weapons and other military equipment perpetuates war and inequality worldwide as well as diverting resources away from social investments that contribute to community and environmental wellbeing. The amount spent on

2 Benjamin Neimark, Oliver Belcher, Patrick Bigger. 2019. "Us Military Is a Bigger Polluter Than as Many as 140 Countries – Shrinking This War Machine Is a Must." <https://theconversation.com/us-military-is-a-bigger-polluter-than-as-many-as-140-countries-shrinking-this-war-machine-is-a-must-119269>

3 Ishika Mookerjee. 2019. "How Much Would it Cost to Stop Climate Change? It's a Staggering Amount." <https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/how-much-would-it-cost-to-stop-climate-change-it-s-a-staggering-amount-20191025-p5344h.html>

4 World Resources Institute. 2018. "Green Climate Fund Contributions Calculator." <https://www.wri.org/resources/data-visualizations/green-climate-fund-contributions-calculator>

5 SIPRI. 2020. "Global Military Expenditure Sees Largest Annual Increase in a Decade—Says Sipri—reaching \$1917 Billion in 2019." [https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/global-military-expenditure-sees-largest-annual-increase-decade-says-sipri-reaching-1917-billion#:~:text=\(Stockholm%2C%2027%20April%202020\),growth%20in%20spending%20since%202010](https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/global-military-expenditure-sees-largest-annual-increase-decade-says-sipri-reaching-1917-billion#:~:text=(Stockholm%2C%2027%20April%202020),growth%20in%20spending%20since%202010).

armaments each year would fund the entire UN projects budget for 615 years.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, conflicts justify further militarisation and profit making through military means while causing irreparable damage to the environment. Weapons need to be tested—regularly: the environmental damage caused by military exercises and weapons testing during peacetime exceeds that of wars themselves. Furthermore, the production of nuclear weapons has created an immediate threat of nuclear destruction and a continual and protracted threat through the creation of nuclear waste. The devastating impact of militaries’ environmental footprints are also very much racialised and gendered. Most nuclear weapons in the US and Europe have been tested on the land of Indigenous Peoples with alarming health consequences, especially for women and children, which can last for decades.

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## Who bears responsibility for reversing the current crisis?

The primary responsibility for our current climate crisis lies on many wealthy, industrialised states in the Global North, while the effects are most egregiously felt by marginalised people, particularly in the Global South. Countries emitting the most carbon dioxide, and bearing the greatest historical responsibility for climate change, are also the wealthiest. Collectively, they represent 86% of global emissions, whereas the world’s poorest nations have contributed less than 1% – while also being most vulnerable to climate change.<sup>7</sup> In other words, communities that played no part in contributing to climate change now bear the brunt of its consequences. Global capitalism and its manifestation in neoliberal policies continue to demand infinite growth from finite resources, wreaking havoc on the political, social and economic infrastructure critical for protecting our communities.

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Gender plays a key role in the construction and experiences of environmental and climate change as well as institutional responses to their repercussions. Women face higher risks from climate change, as they constitute the majority of the world’s poorest people, and their lack of access to economic opportunities reduces their capacities to adapt to climate-related impacts. Yet, patriarchal and gendered power structures prevent marginalised populations, including women and Indigenous Peoples, from being equal partners in climate-related decision-making processes. Alarmingly, communities at the frontlines of resistance to the military industrial complex—those fighting to preserve lands, forests and territories—often are subjected to extreme rates of violence. These threats are exacerbated by the dynamics of gender-based violence,<sup>8</sup> with a twofold increase in the number of environmental defenders murdered over the last 15 years.<sup>9</sup> Women environmental and human rights defenders face ongoing, multifaceted and often state-sanctioned and military-backed threats to their and their families’ lives and livelihoods, often with impunity for the perpetrators.

6 WILPF. 2015. “Climate Change, Environment and Militarism.” <http://www.wilpf.org/climate-change-environment-and-militarism/>

7 Hannah Ritchie. 2018. “Global Inequalities in CO2 Emissions.” <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-by-income-region>

8 IUCN. 2020. “Gender-Based Violence and Environmental Linkages.” <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/48969>

9 The Guardian. 2019. “Environmental Activist Murders Double in 15 Years.” <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/aug/05/environmental-activist-murders-double>

## What needs to change?

Environmental degradation and climate change are determining our collective future, and climate-related disasters will progressively get worse if decision makers do not act now. The threat of armed conflict will grow due to displacement of populations by rising sea levels and desertification, and to increased competition between communities, nation-states and corporate interests' attempts to control and privatise water, fertile land, pasture and forests in a changing world. Militarisation, the military-industrial complex, conflict and war bear heavily on the environment, and must be countered with a feminist peace perspective that prioritises both people and planet.

The Generation Equality Forum, the Action Coalitions and the Compact for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action present an opportunity to focus momentum and implement commitments on the Women, Peace and Security agenda to shape a feminist future. We urge UN Women, Member States, Action Coalition leaders and other stakeholders to ensure that the Women, Peace, and Security agenda is reflected in the priorities of the coalitions and the compact for continued implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its contribution towards the full realisation of human rights for all.

## Priority actions

**Halt the exploitative relationship to the environment and break the myth of infinite resources.** The false dichotomy of environment versus economy must come to an end—there will be no economy without climate action. Long-term investment and funding plans made by member states and international organisations must be guided by gender equality, environment, and human rights. These investments should be grounded in feminist values towards a regenerative, care-centred economy that challenges gender inequalities in care work and simultaneously divests from extractive, fossil-fuelled, militarised sectors and industries. It is necessary to invest in and provide stimulus for green energy sources, and simultaneously to reduce energy use.

**Address the devastating impacts of militarisation on the environment.** This includes development and implementation of conflict prevention and resolution strategies that include an analysis of the gendered dimensions of environmental change resulting from war and specific tools of warfare, and ways in which gender roles facilitate or constrain post-conflict environmental recovery.

**Advance divestment, disarmament and demilitarisation efforts by shifting** military spending to be redirected into systems and infrastructure that strengthen social and environmental wellbeing, including investments in communities affected by climate change and enhancing access to resources for women, girls, and other marginalised populations before, during, and after climate-related disasters.

**Adopt an integrated approach to climate financing for long-term, sustainable solutions, that will secure the development and implementation of funding mechanisms for climate and environment smart solutions.** This should aim at capacity building to catalyse and maintain genuine shifts in power. It should incorporate improved access to education for climate resilience, demilitarisation and end to fossil fuel subsidies and procurement as well as delivery of fair share compensation for loss and damage, strengthening the capacity of local women and supporting local women's initiatives. Governments must develop and implement policy coherence in addressing mismanagement, inefficiency and exceptionalism in finance and militarised and extractive industries. This should include development and implementation of directives and legislation.

**Develop a comprehensive gender-integrative approach to addressing climate change and creating gender-responsive environmental sustainability strategies and programs, and by addressing the knowledge gaps on the intersection of gender, climate, and peace, and that recognises the linkages between gender equality, environmental wellbeing and peace and security.** Governments must incorporate gender-disaggregated data and gender budgeting with comprehensive monitoring and

evaluation frameworks to ensure transparent regulations, which can be rigorously tracked to safeguard human rights obligations.

**Build and enforce robust legal and policy frameworks informed and guided by environmental social justice**, including holding accountable polluter states and corporations making profits from natural resources; safeguarding and protecting environmental and women's human rights defenders; conserving biodiversity; and moving toward responsible use of resources within the realm of public and community needs. Progressive taxes, fees, fines, penalties, incentives, tariffs, and other regulations must be enacted to promote sustainable consumption and production and emissions reductions.

**Redistribute resources, democratise and decolonise decision-making spaces for effective climate action.** In particular, the rights of Indigenous Peoples to treaty rights, land restoration, sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonisation must be respected, and women's civil society organisations must be seen as equal partners, leaders and decision-makers in climate-related discussions and political fora, ensuring their effective and consequential participation, as well as their rights and priorities, in the design of our green future, including through comprehensive funding mechanisms. States, international organisations, and international financial institutions should make every effort to protect civil society and human rights and environmental defenders against reprisals and restricted freedoms.

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