

Step Forward for Equality: Advancing Women’s Rights Through Climate Justice
An Earth Day Call to Action by Zonta International

This Earth Day, Zonta International and the undersigned organizations call on governments, the private sector, civil society, and every day citizens to **Step Forward for Equality**—because climate action can no longer be delayed, diluted or discussed without those most affected: women and girls, and the women leaders who must sit at every decision-making table where climate priorities are set.

Climate change is accelerating humanitarian crises worldwide, and women and girls are bearing the heaviest burden. Extreme weather, displacement, food insecurity, and resource scarcity increase risks of violence, disrupt education, and limit access to essential health and protection services. The United Nations highlights that women and children displaced by climate impacts now make up an estimated 80% of all people displaced, a figure that reflects both systematic inequality and the failure of governments to plan climate responses that protect those most at risk climate shocks worsen inequalities that drive gender-based violence and create barriers to opportunity.

Climate change is not confined to regions of poverty or conflict—it is a global reality leaving no country spared. From devastating wildfires in California, to historic flooding across Spain, to earthquakes and climate-driven instability in Afghanistan, climate impacts are reshaping lives and livelihoods everywhere. While vulnerabilities may differ, the consequences are universal, and women and girls in every context face heightened risks when systems fail and resources are stretched. Further, women’s voices are too often excluded from the rooms where decisions about climate financing and adaptation are made.

The urgency is clear: climate crises are forcing girls out of school, increasing unpaid care burdens, and heightening the risk of child marriage and other forms of exploitation as families struggle to cope with economic and environmental stress. At the same time, deep humanitarian funding cuts and shifting geopolitical priorities are eroding the systems women and girls rely on. In a global survey conducted by UN Women, 90 percent of 411 women’s organizations across 44 crisis-affected countries reported being impacted by reductions in foreign aid. More than 60 percent have already reduced their services, disrupting critical, life-saving support – from emergency health care and gender-based violence services to economic assistance and shelter.

Without gender-responsive climate policies and the meaningful participation of women leaders in climate negotiations and sustained investment in protection, education, and health, hard-won progress toward gender equality will be reversed.





The most effective action we can take today is to raise awareness, educate our communities, and step forward for equality—because every voice, every policy, and every local action helps to safeguard women and girls and build a just, sustainable future. Climate justice cannot exist without gender justice. And gender justice cannot exist when women are absent from the tables where power is exercised.

For more than 100 years, Zonta International has advanced the rights, dignity, and leadership of women and girls. Together, with the undersigned organizations, Zonta demands urgent, collective climate action rooted in equality and guided by women’s leadership. **Today, we reaffirm: women must be recognized not only as those disproportionately affected by climate change but as essential decision makers, innovators and leaders in the global climate response.**

The campaign’s footprint symbolizes both the impact we leave on our planet and the deliberate steps required to build just, resilient communities. Together, we step forward—because climate justice is gender justice, and the time to act is now.



Zonta International

ActionAid

Daughters for Earth

International Council of Women

Indigenous Climate Action

NGO Committee on Sustainable Development New York

Soroptimist International

US Women’s Caucus

Women for Water Partnership

Working Group on Girls