



February 1, 2026

Zonta USA Statement on Women and Environmental Justice

In Alignment with the U.S. Women's Caucus Priorities for CSW70

Environmental justice is inseparable from gender justice. Climate change, environmental degradation, and unsustainable development disproportionately affect women and girls—particularly those facing intersecting forms of discrimination, including Indigenous women, women of color, migrants, rural women, persons with disabilities, and marginalized women. Women are more likely to be responsible for water, food, and energy provision at the household and community levels, yet they often have the least access to land, resources, technology, and decision-making power. These impacts threaten women's health, livelihoods, safety, and fundamental human rights in the United States and globally.

As the Commission on the Status of Women approaches its 70th session with a priority focus on justice for women, Zonta USA affirms that environmental justice must be recognized as a core pillar of gender equality, sustainable development, and human rights.

Environmental harms are not gender neutral. Climate-related disasters increase women's unpaid care burdens and expose them to heightened risks of displacement, violence, and economic insecurity. Without gender-responsive policies, climate action can exacerbate existing inequalities rather than address them.

Due to social and economic roles, women are closer to environmental risks. In many communities, women are primary caregivers responsible for children, elders, and household health, making them more vulnerable to contaminated water, toxic air, and unsafe housing. Exposure to pollutants such as lead, pesticides, and industrial chemicals has been linked to adverse reproductive outcomes, chronic illness, and developmental harms in children, all directly affecting women's physical health and emotional well-being. These risks are intensified in communities located near landfills, highways, refineries, and industrial agriculture, where women frequently lack political power to influence land-use decisions.

At the same time, women need to be essential leaders and decision-makers in environmental protection, climate resilience, and sustainable solutions. Justice requires that women and girls, in all their diversity, are meaningfully included in environmental governance at every level—from local adaptation efforts to global climate negotiations.

Women have been central leaders in the U.S. environmental justice movement. From Indigenous women defending land and water rights, to Black women organizing against toxic dumping, to Latina farmworker advocates fighting pesticide exposure, women have transformed environmental justice from the unknown into a community-driven struggle for human rights. Their activism emphasizes the interconnectedness of environmental protection, public health, racial justice, and economic dignity.



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UN Women has emphasized that gender equality is both a driver and an outcome of effective climate action. The **Belém Gender Action Plan** offers an important framework for accelerating inclusive and gender-responsive climate policies by strengthening women’s leadership, participation, and access to resources. The **UN Women Climate Action Scorecard** further underscores the persistent gap between commitments and implementation, highlighting the urgent need for accountability, financing, and measurable progress.

Zonta USA calls for environmental justice approaches that:

- **Center human rights and intersectionality**, recognizing the compounded impacts of environmental harm on Indigenous, women of color, migrants, rural, persons with disabilities, and marginalized women and girls
- **Ensure women’s full, equal, and meaningful participation** in environmental and climate decision-making within corporate and government policy reinforced by closing the gender pay gap
- **Guarantee access to resources**, including education, climate finance, technology, land, and decent work in the green economy
- **Protect women human rights and environmental defenders**, who face growing threats, harassment, and violence
- **Strengthen data collection, accountability, and transparency**, including sex-disaggregated data and monitoring of gender commitments

Environmental injustice is the result of policy choices—and it can be remedied through just, inclusive, and feminist approaches to climate and environmental action. Investing in women’s rights and leadership leads to stronger communities, more effective climate solutions, and sustainable development for all.

Policy solutions that advance environmental justice must recognize women as essential decision-makers and leaders. This includes ensuring women’s representation in environmental governance, protecting workers’ health, investing in clean energy jobs accessible to women, and prioritizing community-based solutions led by those most affected. Addressing environmental injustice without addressing gender inequality risks reinforcing the very systems that produce harm.

Zonta USA Caucus Zonta Says NOW to Climate Justice stands in solidarity with the U.S. Women’s Caucus at the UN, UN Women, NGO CSW NY, and global civil society in advancing environmental justice as a women’s rights issue. As CSW70 approaches, we urge governments and institutions to move beyond rhetoric and commit to bold, gender-responsive action that ensures a healthy planet and a just future for women and girls everywhere.



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In the United States, environmental justice and women’s justice are inseparable. Centering women’s experiences and leadership is not only a matter of equity, but also critical to building resilient, healthy, and sustainable communities for all.