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A large step towards gender-just climate policies, but too little overall progress

GenderCC's & LIFE's joint statement on the outcomes of COP23

GenderCC - Women for Climate Justice e.V. and LIFE e.V. participated in the 23rd UN Climate Change Conference (COP23), the very first COP presided over by a Small Island State - the Government of Fiji - from November 6 to 17 in Bonn, Germany.

As in previous years, GenderCC and LIFE contributed to the joint work of the Women and Gender Constituency, closely followed the negotiations and advocated for the consideration of gender justice and human rights in all climate action. Through formal interventions in the plenaries, meetings with national delegations, policy recommendations and public activities such as actions, side events, press conferences, exhibitions e.g. on Gender Day at the Gender Marketplace and our booth, and finally through our contribution to the 3rd edition of the gender-just climate solutions awards, we were able to emphasize the importance of gender transformative solutions for addressing the climate crisis and to influence the negotiations.

Two years after the adoption of the Paris Agreement and one year after it has entered into force, the main goal of COP23 was to move forward in defining the guidelines for its implementation. Overall, the progress on this important issue was too slow and Parties left Bonn with a considerable remaining workload if they are serious about finalising the "rulebook" next year at COP24 in Katowice. We are particularly concerned about the absence of human rights and gender equality in the negotiations on these implementation guidelines. In order to be in accordance with the preamble of the Paris Agreement, the guidelines must protect and implement human rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations, and ensure that gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity are at the heart of all climate action by countries under the Paris Agreement and are sufficiently mainstreamed into all workstreams of the Convention. This includes the mainstreaming of gender issues into Parties' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – in particular of industrialised countries whose NDCs are until now completely lacking any references to gender. Gender justice is not only relevant for developing countries!

Among the slow progresses, the missed opportunities and the half-hearted commitments we have witnessed in Bonn, there are two stories of success: the first ever Gender Action Plan (GAP) to the UNFCCC was adopted and the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform operationalised.

The GAP defines five priority areas for action and contains a set of 16 specific activities for the upcoming two years. Among those are in-session workshops for delegates on how to develop gender-responsive climate policies, plans and programmes, and the promotion of travel funds to support the participation of women (in particular grassroots, local and indigenous women) from developing countries. Together those activities are meant to advance the implementation of the various gender-related decisions and mandates that already exist but have so far only insufficiently been implemented under the UNFCCC. Thanks to the strong stand taken by Mexico on this issue (supported by Switzerland), the Gender Action Plan also stresses the linkages between gender equality, human rights and the just transition. However, the GAP is lacking some important elements:

while it includes capacity-building on mechanisms to integrate gender issues into finance such as gender budgeting, it fails to mention the advancement of and capacity-building on tools such as Gender Impact Assessments that are crucial for the development of gender-responsive climate adaptation and mitigation policies. In addition, the section on monitoring and reporting on the activities under the GAP which is indispensable to ensure the implementation of and to evaluate the outcomes of the GAP has been watered-down. Despite its shortcomings, the GAP acknowledges that little progress has been made so far towards women's equal participation in the UNFCCC process and towards developing and implementing gender-just climate policies and actions and it marks a significant step forward in the efforts to advance gender equality in the international climate process. The test however will be its implementation. Under no circumstance can the GAP turn into yet another hard-won, but vastly ignored gender-related UNFCCC decision. In order for it to live up to its promises, Parties now have to come forward with generous voluntary contributions to supply the necessary funds for each activity. And finally the question remains, how the GAP will feed into and inform other negotiation streams crucial for gender mainstreaming progress in the UNFCCC, such as the frameworks and mechanisms for finance, technology, and transparency. Climate and gender justice are crucial for the entire process and all countries must integrate human rights and gender equality in their climate plans and formal commitments.

We very much welcome the decision on the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform that will be conclusively operationalized at COP24. While the platform is only a small step towards the adequate recognition of the rights and specific knowledge of indigenous peoples in the UNFCCC process and for climate action in general, the decision adopted at COP23 contains some critical elements. It builds on the principles defined by indigenous peoples' organisations including the need for equal footing with Parties in the platform and it refers to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The platform aims at strengthening the consideration of indigenous peoples' knowledge, technologies, practices and efforts in climate action, enhancing the effective engagement of indigenous peoples in the UNFCCC process, and facilitating the exchange of experience and best practices on mitigation and adaptation.

In conclusion, a tremendous gap continues to exist between the current commitments of countries and the actions needed to keep global warming below 1.5°C. Not even the presidency of the Government of Fiji and the strong presence and leadership of civil society organisations and activists from Small Island States that carried the stories and the lived realities of people at the frontlines of climate change to COP23 were able to move countries to raise their ambitions. For instance Germany, the host of this year's COP, fails to meet their 2020 targets while continuing to expand their coal mining projects and refusing to initiate the phase out of their fossil fuel production. All economies worldwide have to end their dependency on fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions have to be cut radically. At the same time, off-setting, risky technologies and geoengineering fail to deliver and are no alternative. Governments urgently have to step up the pace, raise their ambitions and live up to their international commitments and responsibilities towards all of humanity.

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