



World Association  
of Girl Guides  
and Girl Scouts



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## COP21: UN CONFERENCE ON CLIMATE CHANGE 2015

### A joint statement from the World Association of Girl Guides & Girl Scouts and the World Organization of the Scout Movement

The World Association of Girl Guides & Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) collectively represent 50 million members around the world. Our organisations strive to enable young people to be active and responsible citizens of the world, who are empowered to create positive change in their communities.

Climate change is the defining challenge of our time and poses a critical threat to our future and to young people's right to inherit a livable planet. As Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon and many others have acknowledged, it is the young people who will suffer as climate change intensifies.

"Today's young people will bear the consequences of climate change, thanks to the unfortunate legacy of their elders. In many developing countries, in particular, youth – especially girls and young women – are often responsible for farming, finding water and collecting fuel wood. These tasks will be rendered more difficult – and will take even more time away from education or productive activities – as climate change affects the availability of water, agricultural productivity and the survival of ecosystems. [...] Left unaddressed, climate change could cause an unravelling of the progress that has been made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and could also have serious implications for peace and security. Unless we make radical changes in the way we live, by the time the youth of 2008 reach my age, the world may well have become a rather inhospitable place."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, International Youth Day, 2008

It is the young people's future that is being risked by the failure to take aggressive action to combat climate change.

For this reason:

- **young people deserve to have their voices heard and their interests represented in all decision-making processes.** Article 12 of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children the right to participate in decision-making that is relevant to their lives. Decisions made now around climate change are deeply relevant and will have a profound impact on the world that today's young people inherit. They therefore have a right to be involved in the design, delivery and implementation of nations' responses to climate change.
- **young people / youth organizations should be consulted and allowed to have substantive input into the design of National Adaptation Strategies/National Adaptation Programmes of Action.** Involving them is a best practice principle of programme design. **Young people are the experts on their needs and life experiences, and can make a genuine contribution to the success of adaptation and resilience programming if given the tools and spaces to do so.**

But if young people are to participate effectively in decision-making processes, they must first be educated and equipped with the skills to do so. As signatories to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, governments have committed "to educate, empower, and engage all stakeholders and major groups on policies related to climate change." **Governments are encouraged to follow through on this pledge to build the capacity of young people**, working in conjunction with youth NGOs in their countries to educate young people through both formal and non-formal channels.



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In addition, **capacity-building initiatives on climate change must address gender inequality** as well. Governments and development agencies must recognise that vulnerability to climate change is severely exacerbated and compounded by gender inequality, and that building support for girls' and women's rights must be a part of all climate change initiatives. As Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has acknowledged, "we will never achieve climate justice without addressing the gender dimensions of climate change."

Environmental education has been a centerpiece of our work in WAGGGS and WOSM for many years. We develop tools and educational resources to help young people learn about environmental issues, including climate change, and build the capacity of young people to design and implement locally-relevant environmental projects. In our work, young people have amply demonstrated their potential to be leaders and agents of change and to mobilize action on environmental issues in their communities.

But despite the energy and enthusiasm, the efforts of young people alone are not enough. Climate change is a global, systemic problem that requires a coordinated, international response. Young people need and deserve real action from world leaders to ensure that they inherit a sustainable future.

WAGGGS and WOSM call on leaders to follow through on past pledges to combat climate change, including those made most recently at the UN Sustainable Development Summit. From 25-27 September 2015, nations of the world came together to adopt the new Global Goals for Sustainable Development — an ambitious framework to guide our progress toward a more just and sustainable future. However, without urgent action to curb the dire risk of climate change, all of our collective aspirations and efforts to create a better world will be hampered.

### **Conclusion**

As delegations work toward an agreement at COP21, we urge all parties to recognise that **climate change is not only an environmental issue, but also a human rights issue**. Climate change threatens our ability to guarantee safety, dignity, and basic rights to all and endangers particularly the most vulnerable, including women and girls.

Without urgent and immediate action at COP21, we risk missing the rapidly vanishing window of opportunity to avoid dangerous and unsustainable levels of warming. The consequences of inaction in this moment will be devastating, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

On behalf of the 50 million young people across the globe who are our members, we call on world leaders to consider the rights of future generations and to commit at COP21 to a framework that is ambitious, equitable, and binding, and will deliver the transformative change young people need.