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Women and Media Collective
Established 1984

Hon. Anura Kumara Dissanayaka, President of Sri Lanka
Hon. Harini Amarasuriya, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka
Hon. Saroja Paul Raj, Minister of Women and Child Affiars
Hon. Wimalaweera Dissanayaka, State Minister for Disaster Management

An Outrageous Exclusion: The Government of Sri Lanka Must Ensure Women's Representation in Disaster Decision-Making

It is deeply alarming and wholly unacceptable that the *Rebuilding Sri Lanka Fund*, established through Cabinet approval in response to the devastation caused by Cyclone *Ditwah*, does not have **a single woman** in its composition. At a moment when thousands of lives—disproportionately women's lives—are being inordinately affected by this climate disaster, the Government of Sri Lanka has created a national recovery mechanism, for medium and long term recovery, that excludes half the population and shuts out civil society, instead privileging a Public–Private Partnership model dominated by corporate interests with little experience handling disaster realities on the ground.

This exclusion stands in direct contradiction to the National People's Power (NPP)'s oft repeated public statements and a commitment to CEDAW – the Committee overseeing the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination all Forms of Discrimination Against Women to ensure equal representation for women in politics and public decision making structures. Twenty of the twenty two women members in the current Parliament are from the NPP, all of them with credible on the ground experience in their electorates and members of the islandwide Progressive Women's Collective, yet none of these women are in the critically tasked *Rebuilding Sri Lanka Fund.* The National Commission on Women has been appointed but with no resources. These promises ring hollow when, faced with one of the most severe climate-induced disasters in recent history, the government responds with a male-only, elite-driven structure that betrays the very principles of equality, non discrimination, diversity and inclusivity. As troubling is the declaration of a State of Emergency with wide reaching powers in lieu of existing laws that grant adequate powers and standard legal protocols for disaster response.

This is not merely a matter of representation. It is a matter of life, death, justice, and effective recovery.

Women and Girls Are Hit Hardest in Disasters

It is well established—by Sri Lanka's own experience and by global evidence—that women and girls are disproportionately affected by disasters.

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The World Bank confirms that natural disasters reduce women's life expectancy more than men's, while placing a severe and lasting economic burden on women through loss of livelihoods, increased unpaid care work, and financial exclusion.

In 2025, UN Women issued a clear global call: "Fund Resilience, Not Disasters." The message was unequivocal—women and girls must be at the center of all disaster resilience and recovery efforts. Sri Lanka's current approach does the exact opposite.

When Women Lead, Disaster Responses Are Stronger and More Just

Global evidence shows that when women lead, responses are more equitable, inclusive, and effective. Yet women face systemic barriers that worsen during crises:

- Limited access to early warning systems and emergency communication
- Barriers to accessing safe shelter, especially for women with caregiving, disability or mobility constraints
- Livelihood constraints as women are mostly employed in informal sector work and subject to climate vagaries
- Constraints to accessing essential services including contraception, menstrual hygiene and safe childbirth
- Financial exclusion without access to banking, credit, or insurance
- A crushing and unequal burden of unpaid care work
- Persistent underrepresentation in disaster planning and emergency management

These structural inequalities mean that excluding women from decision-making directly increases risk, long term recovery and poverty.

Intersectional Impacts Cannot Be Ignored

Disaster impacts are not gender-neutral, and they are not class or ethnicity-neutral. Poor women, especially women from the Malaiyaha community in Badulla, Nuwara Eliya, and Ratnapura, some of the most affected districts, bear multiple layers of vulnerability at the intersections of gender, class, ethnicity, and geography. A Fund that excludes women will inevitably fail these communities.

Sri Lanka Is Violating Its International Commitments

Sri Lanka is bound by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which affirms women's right to equal and inclusive participation in all decision-making systems. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 explicitly recognizes women as central to disaster risk reduction and climate resilience. The government's actions in forming this all-male Fund are therefore not only unjust—they are a breach of Sri Lanka's international obligations.

This Exclusion Endangers Lives and Weakens Recovery

When women's specific needs and capacities are treated as an afterthought, the consequences are grave. Women are not merely "vulnerable victims." They are first

responders, community mobilizers, caregivers, farmers, environmental stewards, and climate leaders. Their Indigenous and local knowledge is critical to adaptive agriculture, water management, and community-based resilience. Excluding them is not only discriminatory—it is strategic failure.

We therefore call on the Government to **immediately**:

1. **Reconstitute the *Rebuilding Sri Lanka Fund* to ensure meaningful and equal representation of women**, including women from disaster-affected and marginalized communities.
2. **Include civil society and women's organizations** with proven expertise in disaster response and recovery.
3. **Institutionalize gender-responsive budgeting, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms** within all disaster recovery and climate financing structures.
4. **Institutionalize the National Commission on Women (NCW) with sufficient resources** as the NCW has been mandated to ensure gender-responsive budgeting, monitoring and accountability mechanisms within all disaster recovery and climate financing structures.
5. **Publicly disclose** the criteria and process used to appoint members to and the disbursement of the the Fund.
6. Commit to **minimum gender quotas in all national disaster and climate governance mechanisms**.
7. Commit to **rescinding Emergency Regulations which are not essential for disaster management and relief.**

A disaster recovery process that excludes women is not only unjust—it is dangerous, ineffective, and indefensible. Climate disasters will only intensify. If Sri Lanka is serious about resilience, equity, and democratic governance, women must not be spectators to recovery—they must be decision-makers.

There can be no rebuilding of Sri Lanka without the full and equal leadership of women.

THE WOMEN AND MEDIA COLLECTIVE
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