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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Asia Pacific Women’s Watch (APWW), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Challenges and opportunities for rural women and girls in the Asia Pacific region**

The Asia-Pacific Women Watch is a network working for Promoting Integration of women's rights and gender equality to assist integration of the standalone goal 5 of the Global Agenda 2030 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" into national sustainable development strategies and sustainable development action plans and for Advocating mainstreaming Gender equality and women's rights and girls into all goals of national, regional sustainable development strategies and action-plan, recognizes a continuing challenge for rural women in our big region.

Agenda 2030 brings opportunities and new challenges for CSOs, especially and women's organizations in the region will need more critical understanding of issues, and well-thought approaches in their struggles for social justice. In order to move forward and to state commitments toward rural women, data on Means of Implementation for rural women is needed.

Gender equality and the empowerment of all rural women and girls are essential for realizing the agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals in its spirit of leaving no one behind by reaching the furthest first. Rural women are the most marginalized population in AP region and it is important to show positive roles of rural women, such as food producers and promoters of community development. Rural women and girls continue to face old challenges and new challenges are not well addressed in national policies and programs.

Various political commitments to rural women were either not well formulated and/nor implemented. Lack of time-bound and well-resourced plan of action on rural women continues to be challenging and they include diverse forms of discrimination against rural women and girls, various forms of violence against rural women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation, harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage. Rural women contribute hugely to care and it is not valued as well as not recognized, rural women face lack of provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family; rural women are especially challenged by very few opportunities for full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Climate change is a major concern for all women in the Pacific region especially for those on low-lying atolls. Rising sea levels inundate and destroy gardens, plantations and water supplies threatening food security, disrupting communities add to the challenges for women and rural women in particular.

Rural women and girls are more vulnerable in accessing their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Lack of accountability on rural women's issues is leading to limited access to education and social services to ensure sexual and reproductive health services, especially for girls.

Rural women have very limited access to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws. Rural women are deprived of their right to the land and they do not own their own land. They have to work in the land of their male members i.e., fathers, brothers, husbands.

Rural women are left behind in development and modern technology including ICT and due to this they are not equipped with necessary skills to face the changing world of work in this era. Rural women are marginalized furthered by IT world as they lack access and opportunity that promotes the empowerment of rural women. Possibilities of emerging opportunities should include ICT, technologies and entrepreneurship opportunities targeted at rural women in our region.

In all our countries, they do not have access to SDGs implementation mechanisms to support rural women and girls strong and sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. Neither the government nor the CSOs are able to ensure their participation and voices. In Nepal, due to constitutional provision of 40 per cent seats for women in local government, women are getting opportunities to be elected in local election. In Kyrgyzstan women have only 5 per cent of seats as head of local governance administration; they comprise only 10–12 per cent in local elected bodies.

APWW is concerned and calls States' attention to increase women's resilience from disaster, such as earthquake, flood, tsunami since such natural disasters frequently occur in Asia and the Pacific and women are the majority of the victims of those natural disasters.

Rural women need accountability for commitments directed to rural women, rural women need accountability to rural women, including accountability for allocations of budgets for rural women's needs. Accountability for rural and to rural women needs new accountability designs with substantial participation of rural women themselves. Rural women must be engaged in accountability processes also as data verifiers.

Furthermore, strengthening women's right as well as leadership at home as well as community decision-making by formulating legal and administrative scheme/system, should be included as action-oriented recommendations that support gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to address the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

We call for governments, private sector and civil society to:

- create enabling environments, both legally and practically, in order to stress the importance of having legal frameworks that support rural women's property rights for increased control and ownership of assets by rural women, improve nutritional and water security and health, specifically of rural women;
- protect rural women's legal rights in property distribution, marriage and reproductive health, political participation and other fields, and enabling women with equal opportunities for education, employment, property income and financial resources as well as providing abundant services;
- undertake gender budgeting and increase budget allocation for rural women's economic empowerment at all levels;
- scale up and speed up effective strategies to support rural women's involvement in small business and supporting women entrepreneurs and increase strategies to support economic security for women in rural areas;
- support strategies to increase women's economic empowerment in disaster and conflict affected areas;

- undertake a high level of accountability, and work with national and local rural feminist organisations to ensure effective measurement of women's economic empowerment including measuring asset ownership and entrepreneurship from a gender perspective, and women's engagement in agriculture;
- measure and value time use and unpaid work;
- apply strong gender indicators framework for the implementation of the SDG's and data disaggregation so that no one is left behind.

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