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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 Regards de Femmes, 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

Regards de Femmes works in France and around the world to ensure that all environments, public and private, in both rural and urban areas, offer women and girls security, equality, recognition and respect for their dignity.

In these areas of autonomy and freedom, women can study, receive care, be judged, work and flourish in the company both of men and of other women.

In seeking real equality of rights, duties and dignity between men and women, including women with disabilities, Regards de Femmes and its partners rely on the international conventions that States have signed and for which they are accountable to their peoples.

Article 14 of the Convention provides that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas.

To effectively implement that article, our actions in France are focused on women farmers and other women living in rural areas, who are described in the first part of our statement.

The second part is devoted to our efforts to raise awareness among States and perform outreach to people living in rural areas about the need for birth registration.

The women farmers of France are proud of their trade and their land; they belong to the rural world, the heartlands of France. They are stakeholders in the environmental, social and territorial challenges of tomorrow.

However, the image of professional value chains in agriculture remains masculine, and women farmers face serious difficulties.

The Senate delegation on women's rights has led a discussion on women in agricultural occupations, who encounter discrimination at every level: training, becoming established, status, social protection, leadership and, often, very meagre pensions.

Working life and family life are inextricably intertwined in their home-based trades, which involve a daunting workload, long shifts and arduous chores.

Regards de Femmes supports recommendations:

- To help women farmers establish themselves, have secure careers and balance their work and leisure time;
- To consolidate their status and improve their social coverage and pensions;
- To take better account of the feminization of the agricultural profession by recognizing women farmers' contribution and encouraging their leadership in representative agricultural bodies;
- To encourage girls to consider entering the agricultural profession.

Access to public services is problematic for women farmers, as it is for all other women living in rural communities in France, owing to a lack of day-care centres or other arrangements for the care of young children, a lack of public transportation, a lack of local health services, and so forth.

In an effort to find solutions at the level of local public policy, Regards de Femmes organizes campaigns to encourage women to stand as candidates in local elections and, for those elected, training seminars.

It has also entered into partnerships with numerous women's rights associations in African countries to assert women's right to register their children's birth: the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises, the Association Solidarité Féminine (Morocco), Musonet (Mali), and the Organisation Nationale pour l'Enfant, la Femme et la famille (Côte d'Ivoire).

The right to civil status is the most basic right, since access to all other rights depends on it. It is recognized by:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which states that everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law (article 6), that men and women have equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution (article 16), and that all children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection (article 25);
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966), (article 24: "Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name. Every child has the right to acquire a nationality.");
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1976), which obliges States Parties to ensure the equal rights of men and women, irrespective of their marital status (article 1);
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), which states that the child shall be registered immediately after birth. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments (article 7);
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), which emphasizes the importance of birth registration and the State's responsibility in that regard;
- The European Commission and the United Nations Children's Fund have declared that the first right of a child is the right to a name and an identity (July 2012);
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls on States "by 2030, [to] provide legal identity for all, including birth registration" (16.9).

The difficulties encountered by rural women in accessing civil registry services are one of the reasons for not registering births.

The remoteness of civil registry offices prevents these women from having their children's births registered. Obstacles encountered in rural areas include travel costs, the time the journey takes, infrastructure and means of transportation, and the difficulty of leaving the other children. Except in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, there are great disparities between birth registrations in urban and rural areas, to the disadvantage of the latter.

In 2016, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women issued a recommendation for rural women that took all issues into account, including citizenship related to birth registration. Discrimination on that account compounds all other types of discrimination that impede women's social and economic emancipation.

The absence of civil status is a mechanism for absolute social exclusion, as the children affected will have no legal recognition and will be refused access to the

appropriate development programmes and services to which they are entitled. This perpetuates the vicious cycle of exclusion and insecurity.

A birth certificate enables each person to prove his or her identity and age. When the age is unknown, how can early marriage, child labour, trafficking and every form of exploitation and violence against children be effectively combated?

A birth certificate is indispensable for all civil status procedures: marriage, divorce, death, inheritance and property rights. Rural women are obliged to register property in the name of their husband, brother or son. Without a marriage certificate, women may be repudiated without their knowledge; widows may be left homeless, driven from their homes by the in-laws.

A birth certificate is also essential from an administrative standpoint: school enrolment and examinations, access to health care, a driver's licence, voter registration, the right to vote and to stand for election, acquisition of a passport, recognized employment, a residence permit, a bank account, and so forth.

To ensure that no one is left behind, it is essential for every child to be registered at birth.

There is a critical need for awareness-raising about the need to record civil status, especially in rural areas where investigative reports show that the issue receives scant attention.

Such was the purpose of the digital platform "A Civil Status for Every Child", which Regards de Femmes built and will present at a workshop to be held during the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York.

The platform outlines the international legal arsenal that obliges States to register the birth of all children and lists those countries where children live who lack any legal existence — ghost children, the living dead.

The platform will also set out the obstacles to birth registration and give the members of associations and non-governmental organizations an opportunity to be heard by the public authorities.

It will strive to promote mechanisms to facilitate birth registration by presenting actions taken in rural areas and conflict zones or those concerning ethnic minorities.

Finally, it will highlight the actions undertaken with our partner associations and institutions, and some technological solutions employing secure mobile applications.

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