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Statement submitted by Women in Europe for a Common Future, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The urban rural divide is increasing in our today's world, this applies to the Global South as to the Global North. For women and girls living in rural areas challenges are multi-folded.

Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF)'s work around the world provides evidence of a gap between women living in urban areas and those living in rural areas. Recent baseline studies conducted by WECF and partners on gender livelihood and socio-economic issues in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan identify the following critical issues:

- Living conditions are harsh and limited options for education and restricted economic opportunities lead to high unemployment rates and poverty. This has serious impacts on women and men. From rural areas in the 3 countries studied, it is mostly men who then leave the country to seek employment abroad.
- This reason, amongst others, leaves both the agricultural activities — previously done to a large part by the men — as well as the reproductive activities (the care for children, ill, elderly, cooking, cleaning) on the shoulders of the women alone.
- Poor access to basic services, such as safe water (and sanitation) and energy, has repercussions on people's health and on their capacity to live a decent life. For example, many rural households do not have safe fuel for heating and cooking. Many rural homes use dung, waste and firewood. The wood needs to be purchased or logged and/or collected in nearby forests, a chore previously often done by men, now also on the shoulders of women and children.
- The impact of climate change exacerbates the situation of rural women, as harvests are increasingly at risk, and natural disasters, such as droughts and flooding, are more frequent, often exhausting the very last reserves and resilience.
- Women lack access to assets and productive resources, such as credits and land. Traditional gender roles reflected in laws related to land ownership and inheritance or neglecting proper implementation of laws are an obstacle for women to exercise their economic responsibilities in rural areas.

Therefore, WECF calls for the following:

- Rural women have to be granted equal rights in participation in decision-making.
- Effective measures have to be taken to ensure rural women's access to justice and their right to own and use land.
- Women and girls in rural areas have to be given the opportunity to education, formal employment, skills' development and training as well as to income generation.
- Rural women and girls need adequate and affordable access to health services, safe drinking water and sanitation as well as to energy (basic infrastructure).
- Financial incentives, an enabling policy framework and new and affordable technologies are needed to provide for the basic infrastructure, including access to safe water and sanitation and energy.

These measures in support of rural women, have already been stipulated in the Article 14 CEDAW, to which 190+ member states of the UN have already committed.

2018 is the year in which the budgets and programmes to implement these measures need to be decided and launched.
