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Statement submitted by Women’s Intercultural Network, 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

Women's Intercultural Network's mission is to ensure that all women and girls have a voice in their government and economy. It is also critical that their voices be heard during the 62nd annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women in regard to the empowerment of women in their access to the information and communication technologies. It is also equally important to hear rural women and their experiences to address the ongoing economic and sexual exploitation. Women's Intercultural Network would like to speak to both of these issues — women's access to media and rural women's barriers to sustainable livelihood — to call attention to discriminatory practices that have to be yet effectively redressed by policy makers.

Farmworker Women

Women's Intercultural Network has a long-standing relationship with farmworker women in Central Valley of California. The challenges and obstacles of these women are comparable to women living in rural areas of many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and yet they are in the heart of California the 6th largest economy in the world.

California produces 1/3 of the nation's vegetables and nearly 2/3 of the nation's fruits and nuts in addition to 90 per cent of the strawberries grown in the U.S. About 500-800,000 farmworkers of U.S. live in California. Approximately 1/3 are women and their age range is from teens to those in their 60s.

Women farmworkers are often systematically subjected to a whole host of violence inclusive but not limited to sexual slurs, groping, threats, beatings and even rape in the fields. In California, 80 per cent of farmworker women claim that they have experienced sexual harassment.

Farmworker women often experience lack of stability for themselves and their children. State-run camps house only 12,000 farmworkers, or approximately 1.5 per cent of the state's farmworker population. In addition, they can live in the camps only from May 1 to the end of November. If they wish to return, they must move 50 miles or more away from the camp during the off-season. This interrupts their children's education. Some farmworkers' children attend up to 4 schools in two countries during the year, and their chance of high school graduation is only 10 per cent.

Women farmworkers also don't get the equal pay for equal work. Male farmworkers make an estimated \$16,250 a year and female farmworkers only \$11,250 a year. Two decades ago the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, along with California Rural Legal Assistance, a legal service program that promotes the interests of migrant laborers and the rural poor, created a joint project to concentrate on sexual harassment in the fields. But, still a large number of women farmworkers are being harassed and justice not being served.

Farmworker women's health is also being compromised more than other marginalized communities. Every year 2 billion pounds of licensed pesticides are used in the U.S. or 1/5 of global use. The U.S. EPA estimates that 300,000 farmworkers are poisoned by pesticides each year nationwide; many cases are never reported. There are an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 cases of physician-diagnosed pesticide poisoning among U.S. farmworkers, and the average life expectancy of farmworkers is only 49 years.

In 2008 15 farmworkers, including a young pregnant woman, died in the fields as a result of the intense heat stress with no shelter and/or time given to cool off in the shade.

All in all, farmworker women in the heart of the 6th strongest global economy facing the same challenges as rural women in developing countries. Their human rights are being violated by lack of access to a safe work environment, health, education, equal pay for equal work, lack of access to media and new technology and overall poverty.

Women in Media

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 47th Agreed Conclusions specified steps to ensure women's integration into increasingly digital world where access, use and participation in new technologies affect every aspect of women's and girl's life. Specifically, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognized communication and information technology as enabling tools in empowering women and girls. As stated in the agreed conclusions from the forty-seventh session, the participation in and access of women to the media in their member states consistently requires careful attention and improvement. Countless reports issued by NGOs and think-tanks which carefully examine the status of the portrayal of women in the media and uneven numbers of women working in media professions advocate for further improvement in these areas. Year after year the statistics remain consistent.

In 2016 Women's Media Center's annual examination found that, at 20 of the nation's top news outlets, men produced 62.3 percent of news reports analysed during a studied period while women produced 37.7 percent. This reveals hardly any progress over previous years. Additionally, in the broadcast news sector alone, work by women anchors, field reporters, and correspondents actually declined, falling to 25.2 percent of reports in 2016 from 32 percent when the Women's Media Center published its 2015 "Divided" report.

According to UNESCO a 2010 research by the Global Media Monitoring Project (2010), reveals that only 24 per cent of the people questioned, heard, seen, or read about in the written and audio-visual media are women; only 13 per cent of stories focus specifically on women; and 46 per cent of news stories reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Similarly, according to the International Women's Media Forum report "Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media", of the sample of media companies studied, only 16 per cent in Eastern Europe, 27 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa, and 69 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa have company-wide policies on gender equality. Such policies include the number of female media professionals employed in addition to other factors such as the pay scales. In the same report, it was found that women are under-represented in 73 per cent of the media surveyed in Sub-Saharan Africa, 50 per cent in Asia and Oceania, and 46 per cent in the Americas.

The U.S.-based Op-ed project was established in response to the low number of women contributing Op-Eds to print and online media. Since 2008 the group has trained over 12,000 people — the vast majority of them underrepresented, and overwhelmingly female. Most notably, the representation of women in our nation's most influential forums has increased by at least 40 per cent.

Women's Intercultural Network recommends media organizations globally continue to hire and train more women and minority journalists to amplify the

conversation and even the tone of information being presented. We are aware and have seen evidence of the benefits of increasing representation in the way news and information narratives are formed through our global partners in the Philippines, Afghanistan, Uganda, and the United States.

Women's Intercultural Network continues to address the challenges of women in being an active member of their community and society. Our circles with women in Uganda, Japan, Iran and Afghanistan are connecting the local to global and constantly learning and building on each other's strength. Our collective voice and advocacy aligned with UDHR, CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action inspires us to keep moving forward for gender equality, peace and justice for all.
