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Statement submitted by Alliance Defending Freedom, 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

Alliance Defending Freedom is a not-for-profit international legal alliance of more than 2,400 lawyers dedicated to the protection of fundamental human rights. We have been involved in over 500 cases before national and international forums, including the supreme courts of Argentina, Honduras, India, Mexico, Peru and the United States of America, as well as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights. In addition, we have provided expert testimony before several parliaments in Europe, the European Parliament and the United States Congress. We have accreditation with the Economic and Social Council, as well as the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union.

Observatorio Regional para la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe A.C., is a Mexican non-governmental organization that highlights the value of women in the professional, social and family spheres through the compilation of information, the exchange of better practices, and promotion of men and women's development.

Vida y Familia de Guadalajara A.C., is a private Mexican welfare institution that cares for socioeconomically vulnerable pregnant women and helps them achieve post-natal social integration through education and skill-building.

Mujer para la Mujer is a non-governmental organization that works to promote the fundamental human rights of women, with a focus on improving the lives of rural women of the various indigenous communities in Mexico.

Centro de Estudio y Formación Integral de la Mujer promotes respect for values that strengthen the dignity of women, mainly through educational initiatives in Mexico and the United States.

Red Mujeres, Desarrollo, Justicia y Paz, AC works in twenty-eight states in Mexico and serves to empower women through trainings in business and finance to more effectively contribute to their families, communities, and country.

We call upon Member States at the Sixty-Second Session of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize the human rights of women by focusing in particular on the achievement of equality for and the empowerment of women and girls living in rural environments and communities. It is critical that Member States examine the challenges and potential opportunities for women living in these contexts, and remove obstacles to the realization of the full enjoyment by women of economic, social, cultural, and political rights. When women are empowered through equal access to education and health-care, the whole of society benefits as a result of increased overall well-being, healthier families, a better-educated populace, and many other positive consequences.

Paragraph 26 of the Beijing Declaration states that there is a pressing need to address "the structural causes of poverty through changes in economic structures, ensuring equal access for all women, including those in rural areas, as vital development agents, to productive resources, opportunities and public services." Paragraph 20 of its Platform for Action states that although there are many urban women living in poverty, "the plight of women living in rural and remote areas deserves special attention given the stagnation of development in such areas." This need for a holistic approach, however, often seems to be overshadowed by the increasing promotion of abortion as a so-called human right. This promotion is a grave threat to equality and the empowerment of women and girls, especially in the

context of sex-selective abortion as well as in that of the disproportionate promotion of abortion in rural areas as a proposed solution to comparatively higher maternal mortality rates. Rural women and girls, particularly indigenous ones, are specifically targeted by the so-called “reproductive rights” movement, in an attempt to present access to allegedly “safe and legal abortion” as a silver bullet solution to issues of poverty, especially outside of cities. However, women living in these contexts are best served by infrastructural development and increased funding of and access to comprehensive and quality health-care services, including adequate pre-natal care, skilled birth attendants, and follow-up care and examinations after birth.

Paragraph 38 of the Platform for Action acknowledges that “throughout their entire life cycle, women’s daily existence and long-term aspirations are restricted by discriminatory, unjust social and economic structures, and a lack of resources in most countries that prevent their full and equal participation.” Real change is needed in order to realize the full empowerment of women, especially in rural and remote regions in which they are too often denied access to the full range of economic, social, cultural, and political rights guaranteed to them under international law. Such change must not, however, include the promotion of so-called “human rights” not enshrined in international law. In order for the full empowerment of women to be fully realized, the right to life under Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights must be unconditionally respected, particularly the right to life of the unborn, including unborn baby girls. Abortion is not a fundamental human right under binding international law, and its liberalization in no way empowers women, least of all the pre-born female killed as a result of the practice. Beyond simply outlawing abortion, however, States must root out the negative economic and developmental incentives that motivate women to seek abortions in the first place.

Relatedly, according to Article 23(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, and the Preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child defines it as being the “natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children” and that “for the full and harmonious development his or her personality, [the child] should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.” Paragraph 92 of the Beijing Platform of Action, however, specifically singles out women and girls in rural areas as being overburdened along with their families as a result of poor economic conditions and lack of access to food, safe water, sanitation facilities, and fuel supplies. As can be seen, therefore, empowering women living in these contexts is not indispensable to the protection and fulfilment of just their individual rights, but also the rights of their family members, especially in the case of rural women with children and other dependents. States must honour their obligations to support and protect the family and ensure that added difficulties and obstacles for women and girls living in rural and remote areas do not make their ability to care for their families any more difficult than necessary. Ensuring this requires a focus on infrastructural and health-care development in general, in order that all members of the family are able to be kept in good health and mobility, especially husbands and fathers who should be present to help share all burdens and duties.

In conclusion, there are many challenges to achieving equality for and the empowerment of rural women and girls in the context of a rapidly changing world in which urbanization and industrialization have become the norm and demographic shifts are becoming ever more polarized. In light of this reality, however, it must be remembered that the Preamble to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledges that “no one will be left behind.” For this reason, States must not forget their

fundamental obligations under international law to promote and protect the family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society, as well as the protection of the right to life of all human beings, including those not yet born and especially those pre-born women whose rights in this respect are disproportionately violated in numerous parts of the world.
