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Statement submitted by Federation of Cuban Women, 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

Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls

The following statement on the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls is made by the Federation of Cuban Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status whose members comprise more than 90 per cent of women over the age of 14.

The world is faced with social inequality, growing class divisions, increasingly powerful multinationals, wars, militarization, exploitation of human beings and a trend towards authoritarianism.

We, the women of Cuba, are witnesses to the fact that patriarchal, predatory capitalism has plunged the world into a deep and multifaceted crisis. Natural and energy resources have been plundered; climate collapse is imminent, as we have seen in our Caribbean area; and the food crisis has devastating consequences, including hunger, poverty and multiple migrations of millions of people fleeing armed conflicts in their countries.

In the third world, resources have been plundered, populations have been harassed, and leaders have even been forcibly changed by imperial fiat, as national sovereignty has been trampled underfoot with absolute impunity. Humankind wants the United Nations to play its part and put an end to the warmongering that endangers international peace and security.

The role played by rural women and the diversity of the tasks they undertake for the well-being of their families and communities, not only as mothers but as traders, smallholders, farmers and producers of food, are well recognized.

Article 14.1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women stipulates that “States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.”

The situation in Cuba is different, although it has not been spared the impact of the cruel and genocidal economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States Government, condemned on multiple occasions in the General Assembly by an overwhelming majority.

The revolution’s social plan has, among its priorities, support for rural women, through established mechanisms, agencies and organizations that, in a cross-sectoral manner, conduct joint activities to implement programmes and projects for the benefit of the rural population and women in particular.

Bearing in mind the basic principle that priority must be given to producing food for the people, in line with Decree-Law No. 259 of 2008 and subsequently Act No. 300 of 2008, a new form of land distribution and production has been launched. This entails granting usufruct in order to strengthen productivity and promote employment for women and men. More than 12,000 women have been granted possession of land, along with full access to credit, technical assistance and other opportunities. This enables women to more closely manage and have greater control over land and resources and to apply sound environmental principles.

More than 200,000 women are currently working in agriculture. Of these, 108,104 work in agricultural enterprises, 106,209 in production units, and 2,063 in the agricultural sciences; of the latter, 253 are scientists.

In the sugar sector, traditionally a male industry, 22 per cent of the labour force are women, and 590 hold management positions. Of these, five are directors in the central agency, 70 are directors in functional positions, 44 are vice-directors, and 41 are company directors. Nine are directors of agro-industrial complexes.

The number of women serving as leaders of the National Association of Small Farmers has risen to 438, or 48.6 per cent of the total. Nineteen per cent of women are members of cooperatives. Women account for more than 36.7 per cent of the technical workforce and 31 per cent of engineers. There are 5 women provincial chairs of credit and service cooperatives, that is 33.3 per cent, and 52 women municipal chairs of the National Association of Small Farmers (31 per cent).

The rights of rural women and girls are guaranteed. In the mountainous areas, a special programme is under way to improve the quality of life, especially for women, with priority being given to basic services in health, education and food. There is also a cultural programme, involving the construction of video and television rooms. This helps to raise awareness among the population in the areas of environmental conservation and risk reduction and to mitigate the inevitable effects of climate change. Many of these facilities operate with solar cells and provide jobs for women.

In spite of the serious drought that has hit the country, more than 2,000 water-supply systems have been installed to supply rural areas with chlorinated drinking water. The use of ceramic filters to improve the quality of this precious liquid has been increased. This has benefited more than 3,000 communities, providing them services that are comparable in quality with those of urban areas.

Almost 99 per cent of homes are served by the power grid, evidence of the State's commitment to guarantee the supply of electricity. The national power-generation network is complemented by different sources of energy, such as hydroelectric, diesel and sugarcane biomass power stations, benefiting thousands of homes.

In non-agricultural sectors, rural women work in different departments of the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, as well as in stores, beauty parlours, schools, post offices, workers' canteens, doctors' offices and hospitals, and in sewage systems, where thousands of women have access to new technologies.

The Federation of Cuban Women works in conjunction with agencies and organizations to promote and develop policies on behalf of rural women and girls:

- Since 1992, the Red Cubana de Organismos e Instituciones de Apoyo a la Mujer Rural (Cuban network of agencies and institutions working on behalf of rural women), a regional initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, has monitored policies and compliance with regulations and other measures designed to improve the status of rural women. The network has also been involved in the organization of yearly events held in celebration of the International Day of Rural Women and World Food Day.
- The Federation of Cuban Women and the National Association of Small Farmers carry out joint actions to provide services for rural families, providing assistance for older persons by helping them strengthen their personal relationships, facilitating recreational opportunities and promoting recognition of their contribution to society. They have strongly supported 3,151 joint brigades, comprising 57,075 women, throughout the country and in each of the more than

3,500 cooperatives. Of those brigades, 807 are in the agricultural production cooperatives and 2,341, in the credit and service cooperatives.

- A book was published with the testimonies of 50 women rural leaders.
- The gender strategy implemented by the National Association of Small Farmers provided for the creation of a national gender commission, as well as gender commissions at all levels of leadership and for the establishment of a gender programme to provide training on the subject for leaders of the organization.
- The Cuban Livestock Producers Association has about 35,000 members, of whom 10,026, or 28.65 per cent of the total, are women. It also has a gender strategy, implemented at all levels of the organization.

The Federation of Cuban Women supports rural women, who have a high profile, unlike the situation in other parts of the world. This is made possible by the political will of the State and the Government, and the social goals we pursue.

We Cuban women call for the right to a life of dignity and prosperity for all rural women and girls around the world, through the construction of a new international economic and social order that is fair and just: a prerequisite for the survival of present and future generations.
