



# Economic and Social Council

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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 Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, 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

With 43% of the world's agricultural work-force being women, to truly leave no one behind and achieve the sustainable development goals, true diversity in stakeholders must be integrated into the conversation on the empowerment of rural women. As agents of change and transformation, women are at the forefront of social, cultural and behavioural change in rural communities, but are often the most vulnerable as well. Drawing from multiple policy frameworks, the following statement encompasses the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation's (BTCF or Tzu Chi) recommendations to participants of CSW62, calling upon the Commission and all stakeholders to:

### **Integrate rural women into roles of leadership in development.**

Tzu Chi affirms the Agenda for Humanity and its core responsibilities, committing to the agreements established by the Grand Bargain Initiative, specifically Goal 6: "A participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions that affect their lives." We hold true the belief that those who receive aid must assume the mantle of leadership and personal sovereignty. Tzu Chi implements programs that empower local communities and their leadership, such as our work in Sierra Leone, where all humanitarian efforts are developed and carried forth by local populations. We recommend and encourage all stakeholders, civil society, international, and national agencies, as well as the faith community to not only recognize the vital integration of those receiving aid into leadership roles, but also to truly take action into building local leadership capacity, and subsequently transferring it to them.

### **Recognize the role that faith based organizations have in empowering rural women through formal and non-formal education**

Tzu Chi aligns itself with the strategic objectives and actions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Noting that "women's poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy," and "lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process" (Clause 51), Tzu Chi emphasizes the need for holistic and gender-responsive development programs to lift up rural women and their communities. There is now extensive evidence showing the correlation between women's education and the stability of a society--that the more educated women are in a society, the more prosperous, peaceful, and equal the society is, meaning an inclusive and equitable education is essential to a just and equal world. Goal 4 of Agenda 2030 states to "ensure inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all," a goal in which Tzu Chi not only fully commits to, but develops and implements programs for. In Haiti, where Tzu Chi has built an all-girls school and is providing tuition support, financial aid, and supplemental education for girls to attend and finish school, there is an ostensible shift in the culture of the community in which the programs are implemented in. Taking this evident correlation, and arguably causation, to heart, Tzu Chi, recognizes the role that faith communities has on culture, education, and the connections between the two; and with this recognition, we call upon the faith community and their implementing actors to take a determined role and stance in ensuring inclusive and equitable education and changing cultures of oppression, whether that is within the faith institutions themselves or the communities in which they serve.

### **Highlight the integral role that rural women play in disaster risk reduction**

Tzu Chi affirms the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction's acknowledgement of the role of women in "managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive risk reduction policies, plans, and programs." Through observations gathered from its disaster relief work in the rural areas of various countries, such as Ecuador, Tzu Chi has found that despite women taking on the caretaker role of the family, men are often the primary decision makers. There must be protection for rural women and their livelihoods from the devastating and increasing impacts of climate change, ensuring that they have sustainable programs in place that assist with disaster resiliency in rural settings, whether that is planting mangroves, retention of crops, or increasing food supplies. We recognize the need for capacity building measures "to empower women for preparedness" and for "securing alternate means of livelihood in post disaster situations" (Sendai Framework, section V-36a), affirming the need for enhanced work to reduce vulnerability (Sendai Framework, section I-6) and for a broader and people centered preventive approach to disaster risk (Sendai Framework, section I-7). We recommend emphasized consideration of women in rural communities in efforts of disaster risk reduction and post-disaster actions through inclusion in decision-making processes.

### **Strengthen gender-disaggregated data collection.**

The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation acknowledges the importance of "quality, accessible, timely, and reliable disaggregated data" and the role it plays in the measurement of progress of the Sustainable Development Goals, and agrees with the need to "strengthen statistical capabilities in developing countries" (A/RES/70/1 Clause 48). In addition, Tzu Chi reaffirms the need to "promote the collection, analysis, management, and use of relevant data and practical information" in policies and practices for disaster risk management (Sendai Framework, Section IV-24). Through its work in rural environments, particularly in LDCs, Tzu Chi observes an inadequate infrastructure for data collection and registration of its inhabitants, hindering relief efforts and making accountability impossible. In Sierra Leone, for example, it is not possible to obtain information on the Ebola-affected in areas outside of the city due to lack of technology and infrastructure, resulting in the lack of access to aid, especially in rural areas. Additionally, analysis and adequate monitoring and evaluation cannot be performed effectively. Tzu Chi advocates for efforts to build capacity for data collection in rural areas through improvement of technological infrastructure and government initiatives. Furthermore, in recognition of the role women play in rural communities, and the state of vulnerability of rural women, Tzu Chi recommends priority be given to the rural women as a primary source of information in matters of the needs of rural families.

Tzu Chi hopes the agreed conclusions of CSW62 will reflect the diverse opinions of civil society organizations and include the voices of rural women. Empowerment must not only come in the form of material aid and education, but must also be action oriented, engaging and truly training women to become leaders within their community, giving them ownership and responsibility in a way that further establishes their presence. Empowerment must be action oriented; actions and data must be accountable and transparent; and economic opportunity and education must not only be available, but inclusive and equitable. We believe that true diversity in stakeholders must occur in order to empower rural women holistically and sustainably.