



## 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 Socialist International 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Rural women and girls make up 43 per cent of the global workforce in agriculture and in some regions, such as in South Asia, almost 70 per cent of employed women work in agriculture. These women provide in-depth knowledge and expertise, land management skills and the physical exertion required to produce both edible foods and raw materials for a wide range of industries, such as clothing manufacture, that contribute significantly to local and national economies. Given the right support, the full potential of rural women can be realised to help create and develop powerful solutions to global food security to the benefit of all communities worldwide.

Rural women also provide support to their communities in other essential ways, in largely un-paid roles, which keeps many at a disproportionate economic disadvantage. They remain the primary caregivers in many societies with responsibilities including childcare, sourcing of water, cooking and social replenishment which takes up much of their time. In some communities, the work of collecting water alone can take over seven hours a week, in addition to all the hours spent in working the land and caretaking.

Both the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals recognise the immense and vital contribution of rural women in the sustainable development of communities and the global economy. However, millions of rural women continue to experience extreme daily struggles while being denied the most basic of human rights including protection from domestic and societal violence, access to critical resources such as land ownership, equal pay for equal work, financial support for business enterprises and access to education. In addition, far too many women remain voiceless within local and national political debate and are denied the capacity to influence key decisions affecting their wellbeing, livelihoods and potential futures.

The Socialist International Women urges immediate action to alleviate the suffering and abject poverty experienced by millions of rural women and their families. The severe impact of poverty on the health, aspirations and potential of rural women and girls, their children and other dependants such as elderly family members is immense and shocking. It is vital for sustainable development, peace and stability worldwide to urgently support the development and implementation of grassroots solutions and initiatives to end the oppression and poverty of rural women and girls. Without it, continued progress towards gender equality and achieving the vision of a gender equal global society, to the benefit of all citizens, will be severely restricted.

Rural women are entirely capable of fully realising their potential and providing insights and solutions to issues affecting their environments, including responses to climate change and implementing initiatives to maximise and enhance agricultural productivity. Given the right tools and funding women's networks and cooperatives can and have made impressive progress. The lasting relationship bonds and sharing of knowledge and experience enhances women's self-esteem, solidarity and empowerment, which are essential to speeding up the process of lasting change.

It is vital that rural women and girls have a powerful voice to enable them to influence positive changes in gender restrictive legal structures, cultural norms and the overall perception of women within their communities. The Socialist International Women strongly believes that encouraging active political participation of rural women at both local and national level is a critical factor in creating the normalisation of gender equality required to make a real difference in their everyday lives. It is therefore critical to the success of achieving true gender

equality to encourage and support the meaningful political participation of rural women. Meaningful participation can be a powerful catalyst for change, whether this is in women chairing local community meetings, creating women's collectives, or standing as candidates in local and national elections.

The challenges of political participation for many rural women are wide ranging. In some regions traditional attitudes and cultural norms are powerful barriers to participation. Women and girls are not seen as relevant in decision making and their huge contribution is not recognised, so they are excluded from debates. There are also practical issues such as lack of time due to other responsibilities, lack of transport to events, or lack of access to information and services which could support them.

By far the most powerful tools to help rural women become empowered, engage and connect to their local and global community are the technologies of the internet and mobile phones. Regions which were once isolated from the rest of the world can now communicate easily and regularly. This has revolutionised areas such as timely lifesaving communications of impending dangers, enhancing the abilities of growers and buyers to connect and improving the skills and knowledge of rural women. It is becoming increasingly common for remote communities on mountain sides, or on farms to be able to access information, videos, new ideas and resources as well as banking and financial services without the need to travel anywhere. This access and interaction has already completely transformed the lives of millions of rural women in a relatively short period of time and helped them towards economic and social independence.

Access to essential information on sexual and pregnancy health, as well as news and educational opportunities on agricultural, climate and political issues helps rural women and girls to radically improve their lives and feel empowered to explore their full potential. It also encourages women to make informed decisions in both their working and personal lives, which is proven to improve not just their own health, wealth and prospects, but also those of their children, particularly girl children.

There is still much work to do, particularly in ensuring that internet and mobiles services are affordable for local women and girls, but these tools offer immense potential for swift and fundamental change. The Socialist International Women strongly supports the continued development of technologies which open the doors to accessibility for rural women and girls and urges increased funding to initiate and implement further development in this area worldwide.

The vision of a gender equal world where women and men achieve their full potential, free from gender based violence and with equal access to financial and educational resources is at the core of what Socialist International Women believes in and continues to strive towards. To this end, Socialist International Women urges all Member States, United Nations entities and Non-Governmental Organisations and civil society to focus on developing and implementing solutions to the challenges that far too many rural women experience, specifically proving gender supportive funding and resource allocation to deprived rural areas, to accelerate the full development and financial independence of women and girls in all rural communities worldwide.

Socialist International Women — a non-governmental organisation with consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council - recommits to supporting the economic empowerment of all women and girls by continuing to discuss these issues at its meetings and encouraging its 140 member organisations to actively campaign and advocate in their respective countries and urge their governments to implement policies, legislation and initiatives that support the

achievement of the economic empowerment of women. Socialist International Women commits to contributing effectively to the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The Socialist International Women takes this opportunity to call upon all Member States to:

- Encourage rural women to participate in local and national political debate and strengthen their voice to ensure the inclusion of locally relevant gender sensitive issues and concerns and campaign for the funding and development of initiatives and legislation which promote and maintain the economic empowerment of rural women.
- Increase awareness of the invaluable contribution of rural women to the social cohesion and sustainable economic wellbeing of communities and nations through education, political debate, local and national media to encourage and support gender supportive changes in cultural norms in societal and working practices and policies, legislation and governmental action and funding.
- Urge governments and local communities to allocate funding and implement programmes to ensure rural women and girls have affordable access to new technologies and social media, including equipment — such as computers and mobiles phones — and training to enable them to fully exploit the learning, knowledge and communication capabilities of all appropriate technological platforms.

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