



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

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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 Women’s Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 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

The Women's Missionary Society (WMS) of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) welcomes the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations. WMS AMEC is an international faith-based organization. The WMS AMEC is composed of over 800,000 members located across four continents in thirty-two countries.

We acknowledge that females and males are created equally in the image of God. As such, we oppose all forms of gender-based violence, discrimination, oppression, and affirm the promotion of gender justice and equality from a human rights perspective. The WMS denounces gender-based discrimination and violence and the use of religious teachings to justify them. We commit to increasing our efforts in this regard by building multi-sectoral partnerships, engaging other faith leaders, strengthening our advocacy, developing codes of conduct and policies that empower women and girls, work with men and boys, challenging harmful and discriminatory interpretations and practices.

As a faith based women's organization, we work to promote the economic and spiritual empowerment of women, girls and boys. We support women farmers, women small business development, work to eradicate hunger, care for the sick (including those with Fistula and persons living with HIV/AIDS), promote peace and leadership development, and continue to address the scourge of human trafficking and violence against women and girls. The Women's Missionary Society emphasizes that the empowerment of women of all ages and girls is fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We are concerned by the increasing misuse of religious doctrine as a tool for violence based behaviour against women, leading often to misused theological discourses not linked to a particular faith tradition. In such a context, women's rights often become a contentious issue. Yet faith and religious practices or institutions can and often do play a leading role in the discussion on gender equality by cooperating positively toward a redefinition of roles and structures, and by ensuring inclusiveness and the participation of women as actors of change.

We welcome this year's discussion of the needs and rights of rural women around the world. Some key areas of concern for rural women today include: land-grabbing and lack of access to land; the impact of climate change on agriculture and rural areas; the privatization of critical public services; and the corporate appropriation of the world's bio-diversity, particularly regarding indigenous resources.

Women's access to critical resources, including health, education, transportation, rural economic development, security, and other concerns, is not possible without addressing key systemic national and global trends. These include macro-economic policies; climate change; and conflict.

Any efforts to address the immediate concerns of rural women must challenge the macro-economic and trade policies that have systematically undermined the livelihoods, food sovereignty, access to services, and autonomy of rural women.

The potential of rural women to contribute to the fulfilment of the SDGs cannot be fully realized unless the UN and member states work to address the following barriers:

### **Climate Change, Farming and Food Sovereignty**

Despite the advances made through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), hunger and malnutrition persist. Drought, uncertain rainfall, deforestation, rising sea levels which cause salination of water supply, and the prevalence of natural disasters due to environmental degradation and climate change, contribute greatly to global food insecurity.

In many communities where our members and partner organizations are present, rural women engage in small-scale agriculture and food production but lack access to ownership and control of arable land, seeds and sustainable fertilizer, fishing sites, more efficient equipment and farming methods, markets, and financial resources. Large agribusiness rather than local farms dominates food production. Despite advancements made through global initiatives, access to clean water, effective irrigation methods, food deserts, and lack of electricity continues to be problematic, and contributes to both global and local food and nutrition insecurity.

Women in rural areas play a vital role in agriculture and the production of food, and must be supported in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, as they seek to expand agricultural production to eradicate poverty and hunger.

### **Access to Education**

Primary, secondary and tertiary education and training of rural women and girls is essential.

Reports from our members and partners around the world indicate that high rates of illiteracy persist, especially among poor rural women and girls. Due to gender discrimination, harmful cultural practices including child, early and forced marriage, restricted access to sanitary products, and sexual harassment issues surrounding accessing education, women and girls are often prevented from taking full advantage of educational opportunities.

### **Transportation and Access to Resources**

Rural areas around the world suffer from a lack of adequate infrastructure and public transportation.

Not only does the lack of adequate transportation affect food distribution, but it also prevents people from accessing medical and social services in rural areas. Women and girls who lack access to safe and reliable means of transportation are often forced to walk long distances, making them vulnerable to violence and sexual assault.

### **Access to Medical Care, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)**

Rural communities lack access to adequate medical care, as well as information and services that would support the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of rural women. With a lack of basic medical care and nutritional supplements, contribute to high rates of maternal and infant mortality, fistula and the continued spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

### **Woman Empowerment in Governance and Structures**

Although women contribute important skills to their communities, including farming the land, producing food, supporting families, and caring for the sick, they

are often not acknowledged for their contributions. Women's caregiving work most often is not valued or paid. Member states should prioritize the contributions of women, the need for women to be included at leadership levels and for gender-sensitive policies and programs.

### **Recommendations for the United Nations and Member States**

WMS urges member states to:

- Consider faith communities as integral partners in the protection and promotion of the human rights of all people, particularly in the prevention and elimination of discrimination and violence against women and girls.
- Fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action and apply a gender lens to all the SDGs.
- Address environmental degradation and climate change (SDG13) and their disproportionate effect on rural women.
- Increase women's access to land, protecting small-scale farms and cooperatives, and creating access to finance for women farmers for the improvement of agriculture and better nutrition for women and their families.
- Increase women and girls' access to education; right to own land; right to obtain loans; right to market goods; ability to transport goods; ability to access agricultural extension training; and other resources for rural women and women farmers.
- Encourage all people, especially men and boys, to actively participate in the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.
- Challenge programs that prioritize agricultural exports and debt-repayments over food sovereignty, particularly food grown by women small-scale farmers.
- Dismantle privatization schemes that undermine fundamental social services, including education, health care, transportation, and jobs.
- Partner with civil society and faith-based organizations to address the structure of injustices that demean and diminish the full dignity and sacred worth of all women and girls.
- Address misused religious doctrine as a threat to realizing women's human rights, particularly affecting women from vulnerable groups, such as rural women.

The Women's Mission Society believes that all people, regardless of their gender or location within a Nation State, should have access to basic human rights such as nutritious food, education, transportation, protection, and medical care. The time is now to prioritize the rights and needs of rural women and girls.