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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary — Loreto Generalate, 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

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary — Loreto Generalate welcomes the opportunity to address the 62nd Session of the Commission on the “Challenges and opportunities in achieving equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”. As rural women are not a homogeneous group, this statement will focus on rural women living on small family farms and contracted and migrant women on large landholdings.

Leave no one behind. This was a basic commitment made by Member States when adopting the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Globally, with only a few exceptions rural women fare worse than rural men, urban women and men and are more likely to be left behind.

This organization is aware of the women who provide skills, labour and dedication to assure a safe food supply in every country where we are present. Globally rural women make up over a quarter the world population and the majority of the 43% of women in the global agricultural labour force. While agriculture continues to be the main source of employment, livelihood and income for between 50%–90% of the population with small farmers making the up the majority, the industrialization of agriculture is proving detrimental for small farmers’ livelihoods and also food security in developing countries. When it comes to owning land, accessing agricultural inputs, financing and technologies, women are left far behind men.

The poverty and low social status of rural women in most societies is a major contributor to chronic poverty. It also makes them vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking. Substantial evidence from many countries shows that focusing on the needs and empowerment of women is one of the keys to human development.

Migrant female workers in agriculture are among the most marginalized, facing severe exploitation and infringement of their human rights and dignity. It is imperative that their economic, social, health and education needs are met.

The disadvantages and discrimination which continue to plague rural women and girls living in remote and isolated areas begin with birth registration. Every girl child has the right to be registered. This is not implemented universally. In fact, even where the infrastructure necessary exists, the actual registration is not effectively implemented.

A basic service essential to move people, and specifically rural girls and women out is poverty, is education. We find a frustrating lack of awareness among women in some isolated areas of the need to educate themselves or their children. Quality compulsory primary and secondary education is basic fair treatment for the girl child. It is not enough to have the building, it needs qualified and dedicated teachers and the infrastructure which aligns with the human dignity of the child and the possibility of achieving her full potential.

Access to free, safe formal and non-formal education is essential to transcend the constraints imposed by social norms, specifically in rural and isolated areas, which limit girls and women’s vision of how they might want to live their lives, their limited time and energy. Although many initiatives are in place to support women’s empowerment, there is still need to do more work on social norms and behaviours to achieve transformation for rural girls and women.

Weak legislation and institutional frameworks militate against the empowerment of rural women and girls. The gap between provisions for equality and customary laws and practices remain a challenge in many countries. Women’s

ability to own and inherit land and property is undermined when they lack knowledge about their rights and legal equality. If it already exists in the legislation is not enforced.

Access to financing remains a challenge for rural women when they need to strategically invest enough to move out of poverty. Although several platforms have been introduced to provide micro lending, these platforms can become a new frontier for deepening poverty and violence among rural families. Programs and support that enable them to acquire the diverse economic skills required for their economic empowerment.

In several countries people living in rural areas are not covered by any type of social protection. Ensuring a basic level of income security and access to services, especially education and health care is a human right and a key factor for social and economic development. In countries where state-run social protection coverage focuses on organized sectors of public and industrial employment, the vast majority of rural populations and significantly rural women are left unprotected. A Social Protection Floor would give rural women the certainty of being able to meet their needs.

The commitment to leave no one behind and thus ensure that every rural woman and girl can participate in social, economic, political and cultural life with equal rights and enjoy the full range of opportunities expressed in the 2030 Agenda will be achieved only with an increased impetus and political will.

Recommendations

- Ensure that birth registration of all children and especially the girl child is effectively implemented in all rural areas in every member state.
- Invest in quality formal and non-formal education in rural communities, supporting a gender-sensitive education system that considers the specific needs of rural girls and women.
- Invest in programs to empower rural women to take action to improve their own living and working conditions.
- Adapt existing social protection mechanisms to rural realities, especially those of women and girls.
- Invest in and strengthen efforts to meet the basic needs of rural women and girls by providing them with access to critical rural infrastructure.
- Promote gender sensitive credit schemes for women farmers to enable them to increase their productivity.
- Ensure that the perspectives of rural women are taken into account and that they participate at every stage in policies and programs related to their life, work and well-being.