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Statement submitted by Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 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 Episcopal Church, known at the United Nations as the “Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.” is a Christian denomination of two million members in 17 countries and a province of the Anglican Communion.

As Christians, we believe that all humans are created equal in God’s image. Our scriptures, the way of Jesus Christ and our Baptismal Covenant call us to seek and serve Christ in all persons, regardless of gender. These values lead us to affirm and accompany the United Nations and member states in supporting women and girls through dialogue, international agreements and conventions. The Episcopal Church also supports rural women and girls through the resolutions of General Convention, its governing body. The Church’s mission and the work of rural congregations and networks, including many indigenous communities, provide rural women and girls with spiritual care, socio-economic development, ministries to farmers, migrant workers and women, domestic poverty and asset-based community development programs, and international development programs through Episcopal Relief & Development.

Many rural women and girls exercise effective leadership as empowered agents who contribute positively in their homes and communities. Evolving social norms, expanding human rights and increasing numbers of women working outside the home have enhanced their opportunities. Rural women take advantage of these and contribute to their societies as individual and collective agents, drawing on their knowledge of their land, environment, community and culture.

Still, too often they face challenges, inequalities and beliefs that impede them from further empowering themselves. We call upon member states, the UN community and civil society to overcome these by addressing four priorities:

Prioritize resources and programs for marginalized groups of rural women and girls

As followers of Jesus, Episcopalians are called to lift up the least, the left out, the lost, the marginalized, the disempowered and the forgotten. This aligns with “Leave No One Behind” and “reach the furthest behind first”, principles of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, which our Church affirmed in 2016.

Reaching the furthest behind first means prioritizing resources and programs aimed at their greater political, economic and social opportunity and inclusion. Particular groups suffer disproportionately: women in the most isolated and poorest rural regions; indigenous women; women with disabilities; immigrant women; women from minority groups based on ethnicity, race, caste, descent, language, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity/expression; migrants, refugees, undocumented workers and stateless women; enslaved, trafficked or incarcerated women; unemployed women; women whose work is considered socially immoral, illegal or unacceptable; older women; and women heads of households. The intersectionality of race, class and gender exacerbate these challenges. These groups’ needs trail broader resource allocation and programming and consequently, they are perpetually disadvantaged, marginalized, discriminated against, displaced and excluded.

We urge member states, United Nations entities and civil society to:

- exercise preferential financing, resource allocation and programming aimed at their inclusion;

- promote awareness campaigns informing these groups and the public of their rights and actions to support them;
- provide contextually appropriate education, health care, child care and social support services to enable them to take advantage of these opportunities.

Extend access to basic resources and services to rural areas

Rural women and girls' geographical isolation means that basic resources and services are difficult to access, expensive, insufficient or non-existent. Inadequate infrastructure systems hamper access to water, sanitation, stable and nutritious food, quality health and medical care, education, social protection and family support facilities and services. Frequently, education is undervalued and girls leave school to marry or care for families and the home, reducing their prospects for higher education, employment and economic well-being. Insufficient digital connectivity means rural women and girls cannot access online resources for distance communication, education, social support, professional and entrepreneurial opportunities. This isolation puts them at greater risk of poverty, poor physical and mental health, distrust of outside assistance and inertia.

We urge member states, United Nations entities and civil society to:

- extend sustainable infrastructure development to rural areas, including roads, bridges, transportation, pipelines, culturally appropriate water and sanitation facilities and digital connectivity;
- extend funding and access to quality medical and health care, including maternal and infant health, sexual and reproductive health, family planning, disease prevention and quality social protection and family support services, including child care, pre-school programs and caretaking facilities;
- adopt awareness campaigns and policies prioritizing education for girls;
- provide alternative and computer training for women and girls unable to receive a formal education;
- provide job training, employment services and leadership development encouraging local community empowerment.

Address environmental concerns and extend land rights

Rural women and girls depend on and benefit from their land, environment and natural resources, which yield development and production opportunities. However, they are vulnerable to exploitation, overdevelopment, and environmental and industrial practices that devalue the land: mining, drilling, pollution and carbon energy consumption that causes climate disruption, creating food insecurity that impacts small-scale and subsistence farmers, including many women. All these factors can provoke environmental migrations. Additionally, most women worldwide have limited land tenure and property ownership rights, hampering their financial independence, perpetuating dependency on landowners and exposing them to unsafe conditions and labour practices.

We urge member states, United Nations entities and civil society to:

- eradicate harmful environmental practices and educate all about their negative effects on land, resources and agricultural production;
- prioritize rural areas for environmental clean-up programs;
- reduce carbon emissions, invest in clean energy sources and promote public awareness of the link between fossil fuels consumption and climate change;

- stabilize food prices and promote and support the use of organic crops;
- align national laws and policies so that women can purchase and inherit land, property and businesses, be recognized as contractual parties and participate in financial and commercial transactions, especially indigenous women.

Promote gender equality education and practices and eradicate gender-based violence

In 2015, our Church's General Convention commended "giving priority to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women, including transgender individuals". This requires correcting present social, political and economic inequalities and identifying root causes such as traditional understandings of gender roles, socialization of women and girls to believe that they are "less than", passivity, religious beliefs, sexism, machismo and patriarchy. New values must be communicated through culturally contextualized gender equality education that includes men and boys, and demonstrates that gender equality benefits all people.

Perhaps the most serious consequence of gender discrimination is gender-based violence, including but not limited to intimate partner violence, physical assault, psychological abuse, harassment, bullying, denigrating language and human trafficking. In 2015, our Church's General Convention noted it "deeply regret[ted] the lack of progress in stemming the global pandemic of violence against women" and requested that its clergy and congregations "speak out...to transform the unjust silence of society in the face of this widespread practice of violence".

We urge member states, United Nations entities and civil society to:

- promote gender equality education for all, including men and boys, examining indicators, root causes of inequalities and the positive effects of gender equality;
- promote women's participation in decision-making, political leadership and governance locally, regionally, nationally and internationally;
- promote awareness and appreciation campaigns on the informal work contributions by women in the informal economy and at home;
- establish equal pay for equal work policies and practices;
- eradicate child marriage;
- provide family and social protections, including paid parental leave, affordable and quality child care and support for single-family households;
- expand awareness campaigns and education about gender-based violence in rural areas and acceptable social norms and behaviours to prevent this;
- universally ratify and implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol.

We must re-imagine rural women's and girls' contributions to their societies, and the ways they are perceived, valued, supported, measured and compensated. We encourage member states, United Nations entities and civil society to pursue these priorities and to uphold the values, principles, legislation and programs for gender equality and justice, which benefit all.