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Statement submitted by Modern Advocacy, Humanitarian, Social and Rehabilitation Association, 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

Combating Impunity in Enhancing Gender Equality and the Empowerment for Rural Woman and Girls.

Women have played an important part in the development of the society at both national and international levels. For example; their valued role is well reflected in the preamble of the 1975 Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and Their Contribution to Development and Peace, which takes into account the role played by women in the history of humanity, especially in the struggle for natural liberation, the strengthening of international peace, and the elimination of imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, foreign occupation, Zionism, alien domination, racism and apartheid. However, amidst the heroic female efforts for societal development, the full unbiased potentials of women and girls still remain flaccid and act as an impediment factor to the expected gender equality measures for real empowerment. It should be understood that the societal notion of women and girls' duties are different within different community setups or localities govern by diverse cultural views and convictions, some of which grant men more opportunities and powers to evaluate and engage in reparative and retributive justice.

Where is the Place of Gender Equality and Woman or Girl Empowerment in the Rural Setup?

Tribal peoples possess innate cultural traits that superimpose or automate individual structural adjustment behaviours which may either invigorate or weaken their will to act or not to. Within such occurrences, opportunities and challenges maybe sorted or readjusted accordingly to fully build the empowerment capacities of the tribal or rural women and girls. Some of the challenges include:

Gender Equity vis-a-vis Cultural Relativism and Gender Equality in Rural Setups.

Without gender equity, the importance of gender equality in traditional setups become paradoxically conceived and most often misinterpreted by inflexible cultural values especially within rural communities. It follows that, for the full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, there is absolute need to make intrinsic reflections on the gender equity perspectives of such rights as they relate to the enshrined norms in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. While as cultural women or girls, traditional societal values have instilled subordinate roles on them and their value and esteem verified within the community context of absolute obedience and docility. Such contextual considerations pose enormous setbacks in deterring their full potential community contribution. The cultural relativist aspect for gender issues recognizes that the roles and responsibilities of men/boys and women/ girls are given to them in specific social, cultural, economic and political contexts and backgrounds. However, if such relativist desires are overzealously followed then the retaining dogma of traditionally dominating men may perpetuate. For example, deeply entrenched customary or traditional rules and habits have influenced a degree acceptance by women and girls in respect to the dominant and take-charge position of their men over certain community preoccupations generally regarded and accepted as the duty of the man. (E/CN.6/2015/NGO/167).

- Female Cultural Impediments on Reparative and Retributive Justice. The rural woman and girl child lays a docile role in both home and community socio-political arrangements. As such, in very rare situations do they engage in firm justice seeking ventures other than discussing with their men who may prefer

them to remain restrained for other selfish reasons. With low levels of education, these rural women and girls are continuously exploited by greedy capitalistic companies and neglected or discriminated upon by corrupt community social support services. For example, when a multi-national telecom company such as orange represented in Cameroun shamelessly and outrightly exploits a gathering of hundreds of rural widows and orphaned children without any material or financial compensation to the effect, then much of the challenges in empowering rural women and girls will remain unresolved. The course to empower vulnerable rural widows and girls cannot and should not be used as an opportunity for enriching scheming and exploitative multimillion companies who are borne with corporate social responsibilities to educate and empower them. In a worse context, such exploitative abuses on the rural women and girls go unpunished by very insensitive and less influential local government social protection services that fail to investigate and impose firm sanctions on the companies and institutions that violate the psychological development rights of the vulnerable community women and girls. In a more critical angle, the psychological positioning of our community women and girls who either lack knowledge on when and how their development rights are violated or believe that even if they report issues of such violations nothing will be done against the perpetrators or perpetrating organs, deters them from feeling equal and capable of making sound and firm decisions over their own development courses. This is a real and challenging worry in an exemplary country, Cameroun, thus increased reasons why huge companies and institutions continue to violate the development rights of vulnerable community women and girls in contrast to the obligations stated in article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

- Modern Education and Local Government and Traditional Authorities Impasses. Modern education harnessed through technological processes remains a serious setback to the rural woman and girl child's empowerment. Major human development considerations are through modern technology in networking and e-governance approaches that are consistently gaining global approval and changing people's lives, but the problem of accessibility of such knowledge in rural areas weakens the scope of gender equality evaluations there in. Modern educational failures in rural areas for enhancing gender equality is mostly rooted in the system of weak local government institutions and the reluctant wills of traditional authorities to fuel an empowerment shift over the submissive personalities of their community women and girls. From national level towards local government institutions, systemic policy adjustments are often noticed wherein territorial governing administrators are mostly men responsible for endorsing traditional rulers, most often men. The place of the rural woman is at times considered in deliberative traditional councils but with very few or no permanent seats for the women representatives in such councils, their voices remain meek. Canvassing for the rural woman and girl child's right to modern education becomes difficult since rural cultural exigencies empowers the men to keep their women away from knowledge that could make them become uncontrollable. In the area of policy debate cited from the Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 and addressing the concept of gender mainstreaming as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels, meanwhile not specifying the extent to which such interventionist mechanisms between men and women should be harnessed, local authorities in rural

communities consistently overlook their failures in supporting or engaging to empower their women and girls. (E/CN.6/2014/NGO/174).

Within the mentioned challenges, there also exist pragmatic opportunities in addressing the rural women empowerment issues:

- The value of gender equity needs to be taught and positively propagated within cultural societies and especially in rural communities, wherein equality values take into account the different needs of men and women and are merged with temporary special measures to compensate for historical or systemic bias or discrimination. This may entail renegotiations on cultural strongholds and the partition of societal tasks within appropriate contexts that changes the psychological regard of the rural women as the weaker and docile societal actor.
- The knowledge of identifying wrongs and seeking reparative or retributive justice alight real power, the feeling of belonging and self-confidence in vulnerable persons. Rural women and girls need adequate knowledge and support on legal processes in their favour. The judiciary should owe a duty to ascertain that no perpetrator over the development rights of rural women and girls remains in impunity especially with respect to capitalistic organs.
- Local government and traditional authorities need to make outright commitments to their rural community women and girls through signed memorandums of understanding which should empower the vulnerable women to hold them legally and administratively to task on negligence and obligations.

Real empowerment comes when a weak person can source timely justice and remedy for a wrong committed against him/her. The feeling of such security opens the doors to courage, hard work and a zealous determination spirit that builds psychological equality at every level.
