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peace for the twenty-first century”

**Statement submitted by Congregations of St. Joseph, Fondazione
Proclade Internazionale — Onlus, Sisters of Charity Federation
Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, VIVAT International,
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

Introduction

Congregations of St. Joseph, Fondazione Proclade Internazionale-Onlus, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, Sisters of Charity Federation and VIVAT International are present in over 130 countries. Many of our members are working directly with rural women and children.

Women are key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 especially the eradication of poverty and hunger. An estimated 70 per cent of the world's poor are women; among them, rural women make up about 1.6 billion. They represent more than a quarter of the total population and 2/3 of all illiterate persons worldwide. Extreme weather conditions and changing climate further deteriorate women's access to land, water and energy. Rural women and girls are forced to spend a major part of their time collecting fuel and water. With the majority of the poor living in rural areas, it is essential to revitalize the agricultural sector, promote rural development and ensure food security particularly in the developing countries. Rural women and girls, the most vulnerable, should be able to realize their full potential for achieving the sustainable development goals.

Leaders during the 72nd UN General Assembly emphasized the need for women's participation and empowerment as a way to achieve development and progress. A majority of the countries, in their Constitutions, guarantee equality between women and men. However, gender equality is still a distant dream in most of the countries. The Prime Minister of Solomon Islands stated that violence against women is an obstacle to gender equality in economic opportunities and livelihoods. The Foreign Affairs Minister of Sweden urged all countries to have their own feminist policy that ensures equality between women, men, boys and girls.

Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls

Feminists introduced the term women empowerment into the development lexicon in the mid-1980s from the Global South. They understood "empowerment" as the task of "transforming gender subordination" and the breakdown of "other oppressive structures" and collective "political mobilization." Daily experiences of women in the rural areas speak that without political change, the structures that discriminate against women cannot be dismantled; any advances they make will be unsustainable. Development organizations' programs must be evaluated on the basis of whether they enable women to increase their potential for political mobilization, such that they can create sustainable gender equality. Capacity building and an enabling atmosphere for women is inevitable for their meaningful participation. Therefore, equal representation of women in the decision-making bodies is necessary for gender justice as well as good governance.

According to UNDP, much of the world's food is produced by smallholder farmers and 90 per cent of world's farmers are run by family farms especially rural women and girls who grow 80 per cent of our food. 43 per cent of labour force in the global agricultural sector consists of rural women.

The global Hunger index 2017 recognizes gender inequality as the "axis of nutritional inequality," as women and girls comprise 60 per cent of the world's hungry. In addition, women's lack of independence in society and households is closely linked to their children's low birth weight and health. Good nutrition is

foundational to empowering girls to grow, learn, earn and lead. When a girl is healthy and well nourished, she can excel in school and grow to become a leader in her community. She can take advantage of the opportunities presented to her and become everything she wants to be.

One of the major challenges small holder farmers face is losing their livelihood to land and water grabbing, by multi-national corporations often with the support of the Government. Water has become the new Gold and industrial agriculture has alienated the small holder farmers' access to natural resources. Supporting the small holder farmers' mostly rural women by providing land and access to finance can increase the food production, which in turn ensures local food security. Small and Medium farmers and Indigenous women need financial support as well as right to own their land.

Role of financial inclusion in empowerment of rural women and Girls

Article 6 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2015, reiterates the need for gender mainstreaming, including targeted actions and investments in the formulation and implementation of all financial, economic environmental and social policies. In addition, countries recommitted in adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation and transformative actions for the promotion of gender equality and women and girls' empowerment at all levels, besides access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy and to eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination.

Article 13 talks of scaling up efforts to end malnutrition by recognizing the complimentary role of social protection floors, increasing public investment in financing research, infrastructure and pro-poor initiatives.

Article 21 says, "Evidence shows that gender equality, women's empowerment and women's full and equal participation and leadership in the economy are vital to achieve sustainable development and significantly enhance economic growth and productivity".

Data is becoming a game changer

Eighty per cent of the 230 indicators developed in 2016 by the United Nations Statistical Commission explicitly or implicitly addressed gender equality created to monitor Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality) lack accepted international measurement standards. Besides the traditional data collected by National Governments, Citizen generated data from grassroots organizations at the village, district and local council levels, where globally, an estimated 20per cent of women were represented, need to be recognized.

Child labour in Agriculture

More than half of child labourers, that is 85 million children, participate in hazardous work and 59 per cent of them work in the agricultural sector. Girls have made greater progress than boys have, with the number of girls engaged in child labour declining by 40 per cent during the period 2000-2012, compared to a decline of 25 per cent for boys, stated in the Report of the Secretary-General on "Progress towards the SDGS". Children have a right to education not to child labour.

Migration and its impact on rural women

One of the most complex challenges the world faces today is large movements of people, a huge increase in the number of people migrating around the world. About one-third of all international migrants are aged 15-34 years. Nearly half are women. Climate change, violence and conflicts are the main forced migration drivers.

Food insecurity is a primary contributor for forced migration both internal and international. Mothers and children especially in the rural areas bear the brunt of food insecurity. This year's World Food Day is themed on migration, and the importance of investing in food security and rural development, so that people no longer have to uproot their lives and take often-perilous journeys into the unknown. Impacts of forced migration on women and girls are grave and require clear focus in the policies such as Global Compact for migration. The increasing trends of discrimination and exploitation including forced labour, sexual violence, trafficking, and unsafe work situations violate their dignity and human rights.

Climate induced migration forces people out of their villages, to cities and further to cross borders, in search of livelihoods. Children often lose or delay their education while migrating to a new place or country and become prey to child labour and other exploitation. Besides immediate relief, long-term solutions are required to prevent migration with good governance and rural development that focus on jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Recommendations

Congregations of St. Joseph, Fondazione Proclade Internazionale-Onlus, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries and VIVAT International urge the CSW and member states to:

- protect the land of smallholder farmers and provide them with financial support including Social protection Floors;
- enact and implement legal frameworks for ensuring women's ownership to land;
- ensure participation of rural women (not less than 50 per cent) in decision-making bodies, especially at the local level;
- develop gender disaggregated data on public finance invested for pro-poor programs in support of rural women and girls;
- ban child labour, ensure free and compulsory education for all children specially girls in all countries;
- promote rural development by providing education, creating business opportunities and jobs for young people and climate resilient agricultural practices for women as an essential component of responding to the migration challenge that compels people to move;
- develop gender specific data highlighting causes, effects and migration trends that lead to internal displacement
- address gender specific impacts of forced migration, mainstream women and girls in migration as a specific category in the national policies and legal frameworks.