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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women****Twenty-sixth session**

14 January-1 February 2002

Working paper on the World Summit on Sustainable Development

1. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women welcomes the decision to convene the World Summit on Sustainable Development with a view to launching new concrete action programmes to implement a clear global agenda for sustainable development. It notes that that agenda is based on Agenda 21, chapter 24 of which emphasizes women's contribution to development, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and related initiatives, and conventions related to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.
2. The Committee's work has highlighted the urgent need to ensure that globalization and transition to market economic policies improve the quality of life of women, who constitute more than 50 per cent of the population in almost all countries. It urges that the concept of sustainable development be perceived as gender-sensitive, people-centred human development, based on equality and equity, participation of government and civil society, transparency and accountability in governance. The Committee wishes to emphasize that sustainable development in that sense can only be achieved by the full realization of human rights, including the human rights of women and the inter-generational rights of all communities.
3. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is one of the first international human rights instruments to combine civil and political rights and socio-economic rights. The Convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Political Declaration and outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly must therefore be recognized as important legal, policy and programmatic instruments that also provide a clear agenda that must be integrated into sustainable human development.
4. The Committee therefore calls upon the Summit to integrate gender equality, into the new action plan for sustainable development since development efforts that are not engendered are endangered and cannot be sustained, particularly in an increasingly interdependent world economy. If sustainable development is to realize economic, social and environmental goals, women's needs and concerns must be



given equal priority with those of men. Furthermore, women's contribution must be recognized, enhanced and given full visibility in working towards sustainable development.

5. The reports submitted to the Committee by States parties demonstrate that women all over the world continue to suffer discrimination because of their sex. They are excluded to varying extents from full participation, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic life of their societies. They are often disadvantaged in terms of the benefits of social and economic development, in particular education and employment, and suffer disproportionately from poverty, malnutrition and inadequacy of health care. All those phenomena are particularly severe in rural areas, where about three quarters of the world's poor live and work.

6. Convinced that sustainable development cannot be achieved without commitment to the full realization of the human rights of women and without ensuring that women are equal partners with men in implementing the agenda for sustainable development, the Committee recommends that:

(a) Poverty reduction programmes consider and address the problem of the feminization of poverty and the need to create sustainable livelihoods for rural and urban women;

(b) Providing women access to adequate health care, including reproductive health care, and providing women and men with the knowledge and means to avoid the spread of HIV/AIDS be considered a critical aspect of sustainable development;

(c) Women be considered as stakeholders with an important contribution to make to sustainable development. The empowerment of women, at all levels, in leadership and decision-making roles in government and as responsible members of civil society must be considered central to sustainable development;

(d) Since investment in the education and capacity-building of women and girls is a catalyst for improved social indicators and human development in all countries, greater emphasis be given to the education of women and girls, particularly as regards access to scientific education and modern information and communication technology;

(e) Controls, laws and policies be adopted and implemented to prevent the negative and harmful impact of tourism, which, although it is an important growth sector, often results in sexual exploitation, trafficking and violence against women and children;

(f) Resources be allocated to preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women since the prevalence of such violence constitutes a serious impediment to sustainable development, peace and stability in all societies;

(g) While recognizing that industry contributes to economic growth and employment creation, codes of ethics and action programmes be formulated and implemented for multinational corporations, especially those that operate in investment and export promotion zones. The Committee also considers that there is an urgent need to develop and promote a concept of corporate responsibility to women workers so that they are offered equitable employment conditions, with adequate safeguards for occupational health;

(h) Sustainable forest management systems be developed to address the concerns of rural women, recognizing in particular women's land entitlement;

(i) Action plans be developed to make general credit facilities accessible to women at all levels and to expand microfinancing for low-income women's entrepreneurial activities;

(j) Particular attention be given to reducing the poverty of older women who constitute the majority of the over-60 population in many countries;

(k) Intergovernmental processes in the United Nations system promote holistic approaches to development through gender-sensitive policy formulation, decision-making and financing, in partnership with national Governments, relevant regional organizations and civil society. The Committee considers that programming and decision-making in that participatory manner is critical for sustainable development.
