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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”

Statement submitted by the Federation of Cuban Women and the Women’s International Democratic Federation, non-governmental organizations 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.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.



Statement

Joint submission from the Women's International Democratic Federation and the Federation of Cuban Women

The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), a non-governmental organization representing millions of women around the world that has been granted general consultative status by the Economic and Social Council, and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status since 1997 with more than 4.2 million members, take this opportunity to make a statement on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges.

Both organizations believe that capitalism has plunged the world into a deep and far-ranging crisis. This crisis is compounded by: the active pillaging of the planet's natural and energy resources, particularly in the South; imminent climate collapse; and the food crisis with its devastating effects, such as hunger, poverty and migration. In addition, humanity is facing increasing social inequality and deepening class divisions, the growing power of multinationals, wars and the trend towards authoritarianism.

All of these various crises are a consequence of the mentality driving capitalism, imperialism, (neo) colonialism, patriarchy, militarization and the exploitation of human beings and nature.

Third World countries have witnessed the pillaging of their resources, the persecution of their peoples and even a forced change in their leadership by imperial command, an act that tramples their sovereignty, committed with complete impunity. Women, together with their daughters and sons, suffer the worst effects. Wars bring with them a rise in the killing of their children, rape and famine. Unemployment rates are higher among women, while wages are lower.

While the situation of rural women has improved on various fronts, they continue to face circumstances that limit their social participation in many areas, such as a lack of access to land, resources and credit and to adequate health, education, culture and social welfare systems.

The poorest of the poor are women. According to the United Nations, more than 300 million people, most of them women in developing countries, live in extremely precarious conditions within the so-called informal employment sector, without any kind of social security, insurance, or disability or retirement benefits.

Rural women, including indigenous women, play a vital role in the rural economies of developing and developed countries. It is women who perform the very hard tasks of cultivating the land, caring for animals, educating boys and girls, maintaining the household and caring for the elderly. However, in many cases they do not receive recognition either from the labour sector or from society for the work they do, and they continuously suffer the violation of their rights.

Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), in her statement on the International Day of Rural Women last October said:

In some parts of the world, women represent 70 per cent of the agricultural workforce, comprising 43 per cent of agricultural workers worldwide. Yet despite their heavy workload and productivity, rural women continue to face discrimination, which is not only a lack of justice but holds back gains in vital areas. If women farmers had equal access to resources and opportunities, they would drive greater progress in ending hunger, boosting food security, and improving health and education.

The Food and Agriculture Organization [of the United Nations] points out that if women farmers were given the same access to resources such as seeds, credit and fertilizer, the results could be significant. Women's agricultural yields could increase by 20 to 30 per cent, raising agricultural production in developing countries by up to 4 per cent. It would also mean 100 million to 150 million fewer people going hungry.

FMC and WIDF support her statement and hope that the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which will focus on the empowerment of rural women, will actually set out policies and action plans to help these women.

It is critical to ensure that rural women enjoy greater recognition and visibility and true gender equity, including equal pay for equal work.

If we wish to reach these goals, it is also critical that we act to eliminate social exclusion by eradicating poverty, promoting decent employment, effectively redistributing wealth, and facilitating access to education, health and culture. The more vulnerable, poor and excluded social groups are, the more urgent and intensive our actions should be.

States have a sufficient number international instruments on this issue, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the conventions of the International Labour Organization. Rural women await for their effective implementation.

The United Nations has the support of the Women's International Democratic Federation and the Federation of Cuban Women in continuing its work to fulfil the needs, demands and dreams of rural women around the world.
