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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Habitat for Humanity International and Huairou Commission, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Secure rights to land and property are critical building blocks for numerous sustainable development goals. Research shows that such rights — which include the rights to own, use, access, control, transfer, inherit, and make decisions about land and related resources — lead to increased agricultural productivity, improved nutrition, adequate living standards, economic opportunity, and greater social status. Invisible in the Millennium Development Goals, women's secure and equal access, control and ownership of productive resources, particularly land, feature prominently in three Sustainable Development Goals: to end poverty (Goal 1), to achieve food security (Goal 2), and to reach gender equality and empower women and girls (Goal 5).

Women comprise nearly half of the world's agricultural workforce. (FAO, *State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011: Women in Agriculture — Closing the Gender Gap for Development* 7 (2011)). However, they rarely own the land they farm. (IFAD, *Women's Land Rights Project: Opportunities and Challenges* (2013)). In many countries, their rights to land are insecure. Women in many of the poorest regions of the world are denied equal rights to inherit and control land and productive resources. Often, their rights to access and use land are dependent upon relations with male kin — husbands, fathers, or sons. Moreover, they frequently do not control the benefits gained from working the land that they use. Large-scale land acquisition, industrial development, and urbanization further threaten women's already tenuous rights to land. Without secure rights to land, women are at increased risk of losing their and their families' source of food, livelihood, and shelter.

Women's secure rights to land and property are central to both sustainable development and women's empowerment. Research shows that secure rights to land and related assets enhance women's status, lending greater weight to their say in household decisions, and lead to greater autonomy and increased participation in the community. Such rights are also linked with better access to health services and educational gains for women and their children. Furthermore, having a secure right to land is a necessary first step to adequate housing, which affects all areas of one's life.

Both the Beijing Platform for Action and this Commission on the Status of Women have recognized the importance of these rights. Under the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, governments pledged to remove legal and customary obstacles and cement in law “women's equal access to economic resources, including land ... as a means to further the advancement and empowerment of women and girls.” (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, para. 35.) This Commission on the Status of Women's consensus-based Agreed Conclusions have stressed that women's rights to land, property, and inheritance are central to sustainable development, environmental management and mitigation of natural disasters, effective “land reform and decentralization” processes, life-cycle and economic empowerment of women, and to reduced vulnerability to violence against women. (Agreed Conclusions, sessions 57, 2014; 41, 1997; 46, 2002; and 2013).

This Commission on the Status of Women has also explicitly called for an end to land rights discrimination against women, recognizing that such rights are central both to sustainable development and to the full realization of women's human rights and empowerment. Under formal law women have equal rights to property ownership in 115

countries and rights to equal inheritance in 93 countries. (UN-Women, Pursuit of Justice, 2010-2011). However, the 2012 Social Institutions and Gender Index of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found that in 79 countries with equal rights to own and access land, discriminatory practices curtail such rights in practice. Even where land access is legally enshrined, women are often relegated to smaller, lesser quality plots, lack access to requisite agricultural extensions services, and face lingering gender bias and discrimination within families and communities and by officials implementing land reform schemes. In its landmark resolution on “Human rights and land rights discrimination,” in which secure land rights are recognized as “key rights for the economic empowerment of women,” the Commission on the Status of Women instructed governments and fellow United Nations bodies to target gender discrimination in land rights as “a violation of human rights” necessitating the “development of secure land tenure” for women and its inclusion in all poverty eradication programmes and policies. (CSW, Resolution 42/1. Human rights and land rights discrimination\* (Sess. 42, 1998); UN.Doc. E/CN.6/1998/12)

### **Recommendations**

Secure rights to land offer women a stable means of economic and social empowerment, leading to thriving families and communities. Rights to own, use, access, control, inherit, and make decisions about land and related resources are critical for women and men and must be made secure while also closing gender gaps.

The following recommendations reflect the urgency and commitments generated by the 2030 Sustainable development Goals and build on previous official Commission on the Status of Women documents.

- States should design and revise laws to recognize and protect women’s full and equal rights to use, access, and own land and other property, including through inheritance, recognizing that ownership is not a relevant type of right for men and women in all contexts. States should also ensure that legally and in practice, there is no difference in the type and quality of rights available to men and women, individually or as parts of groups.
- To end land rights discrimination, states should design and revise laws to ensure that women’s rights to land are unmediated by male relatives, and should establish appropriate dispute resolution and enforcement mechanisms.
- States, United Nations bodies, aid agencies, civil society, and others involved in laws, policies, and programming around secure land rights should ensure that women are an integral part of related decision-making, planning, and governance.
- Decision-making bodies that allocate land and other forms of property should ensure that women are fully represented in such bodies.
- States should ensure that national land reform programmes and schemes acknowledge the equality of women’s rights to land and should take other measures to secure the land rights of poor women and men, as should United Nations departments, aid agencies, civil society, and others with respect to the development of programming that supports the attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

- States must pay particular attention to women and their rights and needs in designing and implementing development programmes and should specifically address poverty at the household level and its root causes, including women's lack of secure land tenure.
- States and the United Nations should ensure that budgetary resources are sufficiently allocated for the implementation of measures to secure women's rights to land and property and for the training and capacity-building of all agencies related to such implementation.
- States, United Nations bodies, and others involved in implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals should collect and make accessible gender-disaggregated data to track women's rights to land in practice, including their rights to access, use, and control land.
- States should develop country-level indicators to track women's secure rights to land to ensure effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda's goals and targets.

This statement is supported by:

Habitat for Humanity International (special consultative status)

Huairou Commission (special consultative status)

Habitat for Humanity International is an international, non-governmental organization whose vision is a world where everyone has a decent, safe and affordable place to live. Anchored by the conviction that housing provides a path out of poverty, since 1976 Habitat has helped more than 5 million people through home construction, rehabilitation and repairs. Habitat advocates to improve access to decent shelter and offers a variety of shelter-related products and services. As a non-profit, faith-based housing organization, Habitat works in the United States and in more than 70 countries.

Huairou Commission: Women, Homes & Community. We are a global coalition in 50 countries supporting grassroots women's organizing and leadership, local development & collective political power through strategic partnerships to advance their capacity to collectively influence political spaces on behalf of their communities and enhance their sustainable, resilient community development practices.

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