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Statement submitted by Center for Global Nonkilling, 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

Women's role in rural killing-free societies: decreasing gender-based violence through women empowerment

The Center for Global Nonkilling (CGNK) promotes change toward the measurable goal of a killing-free world by means open to infinite human creativity in reverence for life. In its Statement for the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/CN.6/2015/NGO/21) the importance of prevention and reduction of lethal and other forms of violence against women were emphasized. Similarly, at CSW60 (E/CN.6/2016/NGO/7) violence against women and girls as part of the Sustainable Development Goals was addressed by focusing on successful prevention programs, ensuring law enforcement against violence, and by tracking the progress by strengthening data collection.

Gender inequality is frequently higher in rural areas where patriarchal values can be stronger. In certain rural areas women and girls have smaller or even non-existing opportunities for education, employment, security, health-care, decision making and thus are second-class citizens. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals related to violence against women is strongly related to empowerment level of women as gender inequality is a strong driving factor for the burden of violence against women and girls. The empowerment level is a symbiosis of all the factors mentioned above, and therefore to decrease or to eliminate violence and killings, focus needs to be on these cross-cutting issues.

Empowering rural women is the path to achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals in these regions, especially to “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls” (5.2) and to “significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere” (16.1). Violence against women and girls has serious effects on their physical, mental, and sexual health. Data shows that in societies that have higher levels of gender inequality, the rates of intimate partner violence are higher. In some rural areas acceptance of harmful norms that support violence against women and male control over women are more prevalent. Such norms are not only in men's mindset; a lot of women still believe that domestic violence is acceptable and excusable. Thus, violence against women is poorly understood in these areas, which is why most of the prevention and eradication work is concentrated on urban areas yet crucially needed in rural areas as well.

Women who are less educated, unemployed and financially dependent, have higher tendencies to experience domestic violence. In rural areas, there are sometimes less possibilities in the variety of education, as schools may be located long distances away, and there can be a high gender inequality in the student acceptance. Technology and the chance to access knowledge is more limited. These limitations tend to lead to less opportunities for personal and social development, often leading to migration. Migration often involves security risks for women such as danger of exploitation, discrimination, or violence. Data also shows that human trafficking is more frequent in poor, rural areas, and that 49% of the detected victims of trafficking are women and 21% are girls.

As there is always a risk that when women get more educated and therefore empowered, sometimes men find it hard to adjust to the changed gender roles and violence becomes a product of these changes. To prevent this kind of backfire, it is important to address the attitudes and values associated with gender-based violence, the concepts of masculinity, and getting men engaged in violence prevention. Spreading awareness through evidence-based school programs is highly recommended since they have the potential to address gender norms and attitudes

before they become ingrained. In addition to school programs, awareness must be spread at work places, neighbourhoods, hospitals and parental channels. Data shows that different media interventions have had a positive impact in violence prevention.

In certain low and middle-income countries enforcement of laws addressing violence against women and gender discrimination is problematic. Child marriages, marital rape, sexual harassment and honour killings are still legal or tolerated in certain countries. It is important that gender discriminating laws become abolished in both policy and practice and that strict enforcement becomes the rule. To support these kind of changes to happen, women's voices need to be heard by involving them equally in politics. However, rural women have less possibilities for decision-making on issues concerning them, their communities and the society generally. More women are becoming informed and engaged in elections and public decision making in spite of cultural opposition, making their voices heard in issues such as corruption and inequality.

There are many different aspects to work on to empower women in rural areas. By reinforcing and replicating evidence-based practices, the Center for Global Nonkilling encourages member states and the United Nations system, together with national and local governments, to engage in supporting gender equality and women empowerment in rural areas, including:

- offering and organizing more violence prevention programs,
- creating more possibilities for both education and employment for women,
- abolishing gender-discriminating laws and ensuring law enforcement, and by
- encouraging women to become more involved in decision making and politics.

These recommendations imply many challenges. However, with the cultural acceptance of more flexible gender roles, respect, and financial independence women become more equal players on all levels of decision-making, the threat of gender-based violence decreases. Thus, it is important to engage both men and women and boys and girls in the struggle against gender inequality and violence against women and girls, to adequately address the global burden of violence, often lethal. Women's rights are also human rights, therefore gender inequality is not only a human right violation, but an underlying structural condition that reinforces lethality.
