



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
7 December 2017

Original: English

---

### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

12–23 March 2018

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 International Presentation Association, 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.

17-20944 (E) 061217



Please recycle 



## Statement

The International Presentation Association is a non-governmental organization with special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council at the United Nations. Representing Presentation women, associates and co-workers, our organization works in 23 countries. We are particularly concerned with the environment, sustainable living, and human rights, with a focus on women and children and indigenous peoples.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a strong declaration of intent by the international community towards a universal and integrated approach towards development. Such a declaration must be followed by strong action. As highlighted in the Secretary General's report on the Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5 (2017), gender inequality persists throughout the world and is underpinned by inherent patriarchal social structures and legal frameworks.

The roles of rural women and girls are vital in challenging and transforming these structural barriers for equality. As affirmed in Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), rural women face unique challenges to gender equality. In a world which continues to rapidly urbanise, the risk of rural women being left behind by broad stroke and shallow interventions is very real. We would reiterate the importance of Article 14 of CEDAW in ensuring that strives towards gender equality and empowerment must also be specifically targeted towards those living rurally to ensure they are not left behind.

Through our work with rural women and girls in local communities, we see many of the challenges that persist and contribute to their ongoing marginalisation and discrimination. Of crucial importance is the lack of education, particularly for young girls. SDGs 4 and 5, calling for quality education and gender equality, taken together demonstrate the intersectional nature of these challenges. In communities where Presentation Sisters work in rural Zambia, for example, we see many cases of cultural and economic pressures forcing families to choose which child will be sent to school, invariably resulting in girls being left at home. The flow on effect from this is that girls are encouraged or forced into marriages at early ages, reducing lifetime outcomes in key development areas. To tackle this challenge, concerted efforts by governments must be made to end early child marriages in all its forms, including through prosecution of those forcing girls into marriage. Accompanying this, universal, free and compulsory enrolment of girls in education from early childhood must be achieved and recognised as a pillar upon which all equalisation and empowerment efforts are built.

The concept of empowerment is an inherently political one, encompassing both the private and public spheres of life. Asymmetries of power persist in both spheres, from women performing the majority of domestic activities in the home, to issues around bodily autonomy and sexuality. We see this in the communities we work with in Papua New Guinea, where domestic violence, early marriages or harmful traditional practices all continue to have negative effects on women and girls. Women are socialised to believe they cannot demand for their rights and do not speak up in households and community. Most, if not all our PNG sisters have endured physical, and in many cases, sexual violence. What is required, then, is concerted effort towards capacity building for rural women and girls in the legal rights and protections owed to them by international and local law, encompassing the guarantees of their fundamental human rights contained within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as mechanisms available to them through which they can assert these rights.

An example of the success that capacity building, education and agency can bring for rural women and girls can be seen in the work of the Presentation Sisters in the Philippines with the tribal Badjao people. Since the introduction of the Presentation Sisters Education Program at the Nano Nagle Center, the tribe has begun to accept the idea of women and girls in school and employment. The centre offers a monthly session for parents on personality development and leadership programs. These programs allow the women to grow in terms of self-worth and self-esteem. Growing out of this program, a group of women were trained together with the old members of the Badjao council to run the community. Each clan sent a representative to be trained and, in 2011, 10 women became community leaders. Continuous training programs has resulted in 9 new female members of the leadership team joining since 2014. In addition to this, the women who are enrolled at the literacy program offered by Nano Nagle Center have seen the power that education can bring and we have seen a marked increase in those parents who are sending their girls to school now.

Related to this concept of agency is the question of land rights for rural women. According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), women on average account for 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing nations. Despite producing a majority of the world's food, these women are either not afforded equal rights to ownership or are unable to exercise them due to cultural or social factors. In many rural areas in developing nations, customary laws of inheritance which favour men operate to undermine rights of women in the family and contribute to the overwhelming imbalance in ownership. Addressing this imbalance is of major importance given evidence that land ownership and property rights are strongly linked to financial security and autonomy for women. Given that women, on average, will reinvest their income into their immediate families, it not only improves health and wellbeing outcomes for the individual but for the whole community while challenging traditional and harmful customs.

Rural women are profoundly affected by climate change and accompanying natural disasters. They must scramble for resources in such situations and if food and water are sparse, women can be subject to violence, hunger, malnutrition, disease, and poverty. They also may be forced to migrate to urban areas for employment in the absence of conditions adequate to grow crops. This can make them vulnerable to exploitation along migratory routes and in urban settings. We call for strengthened efforts to collect data regarding climate change and its effects upon women, especially those compelled to migrate; for humanitarian visas for those forced to migrate due to climate change; and for urgent dialogue and action on loss and damage due to loss of livelihoods resulting from climate change.

### **Recommendations**

Given these challenges and opportunities, we recommend:

First, encourage through government and development policy the formation of community based cooperatives for rural women. Cooperative legislation must accompany this to place decision-making in the hands of women and sufficient funding must be allocated for capacity building and other programs developed within these cooperatives.

Second, vocational and literacy education programs should be extended both through government provision as well as through community cooperatives, focused on ensuring no girl is left behind. These groups provide an ideal avenue through which girls can be allowed to flourish and experience the power of women organizing and driving their community's development. Universal free and compulsory education must be a priority for rural women and girls.

Third, Articles 7 and 15 of CEDAW and target 5.5 of the SDGs must be prioritised through government policy. We reiterate the need for women and girls to be included in all levels of political life, from national legislatures to community leadership. Opportunities must be given to increase women's participation in local governance structures.

Fourth, legislation must be passed universally ensuring equality for women in land rights and ownership before the law. This must extend to ensure and protect the right to inherit or bequeath tenure rights for women. In line with CEDAW, state parties need to affirm the centrality of rural land rights for the achievement of gender equality and human rights. They must protect and promote these rights by raising awareness and providing mechanisms accessible by rural women through which they can assert their rights.

Fifth, the perspective of rural women must be mainstreamed into political decision making on climate change at all levels through the inclusion and leadership of these women. Adequate financial support and economic policy must be enacted to protect and provide for those displaced due to climate change.

Sixth, capacity building and funding for civil society must be assured for monitoring and evaluation of CEDAW and SDG implementation, with particular focus on the collecting and publishing of disaggregated data relating to goals 4, 5 and 13.

---