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**ADDRESS**

**BY**

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**TO THE**

**56<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE  
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

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Thank you Ms. Chairperson,  
Distinguished Delegates,

“The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges” is one of the priority topics in Turkey.

Engaging women in development is of utmost importance both for national economies and for the enhancement of women’s status in professional life.

Awarding women their rightful place in society and gender equality between women and men is one of the founding values of the Republic of Turkey. Although inequalities still exist namely in the labor market in Turkey and political representation, significant progress has been achieved on gender equality issues over the last decades.

Institutionalization of gender equality at the state level has been enforced with new equality bodies that are established at the parliamentary level. Much has been accomplished towards ensuring equal access of the girl child and women to education and health services.

As a result of socio-cultural factors, gender division of labor is felt more intensely in rural areas. Working women in rural areas are beset with such serious problems as low level of education, weaker civil organization, constraint of paid work opportunities, lack of initiative over the household income and deprivation of social security, to name a few.

Turkey acknowledges the severity of the problems confronting rural women most of whom work as unpaid family workers. Relevant strategies are developed and implemented for the rural areas. The National Rural Development Strategy for 2007-2013 targets to create formal employment opportunities with social security schemes for rural women who are informally employed. In this context, we have enacted legislation that enables land-owning rural women without any social security schemes. The strategy also aims at enhancing access to education. Women will also be supported in terms of social and legal rights.

Moreover, strategies aimed at improving the economic status of rural women are also set out in the “National Action Plan for Gender Equality”.

Ms. Chairwoman,

Momentous activities are carried out in Turkey in order to bring sustainable solutions to problems confronting rural women. I would like to briefly present some of these activities: The activities towards the signing of a protocol on empowering the status of rural women in our country and promoting their economic participation are currently continuing between my Ministry and others.

The “Action Plan for the Empowerment of Rural Women” covering a period of 5 years is being prepared in cooperation with public bodies and civil society.

The Ministry of Development is implementing the Southeastern Anatolia Project, recognized as a major endeavor, worldwide. The purpose of this project is to reduce the gap between regions and raise the level of prosperity in Southeastern Anatolia. Within the scope of this project, the Multi-Purpose Community Centers Project (MCC) is being carried out so that women can avail themselves of the public services more efficiently, their participation in the social and economic life is promoted and women's employment and entrepreneurship is boosted.

These centers have been able to reach out to the most disadvantaged and poorest groups in society. This model has also been exported to several other countries. Over 15 thousand young women have directly benefitted from these programs each year and approximately 60 thousand people indirectly benefit from their activities and services.

The "Agricultural Extension for Women Farmers Project" is another activity which pursues the objective of educating rural women on agricultural matters and empowering them. Within this Project, women receive support and assistance for taking steps to participate in the labor force.

Training programs are offered in 81 provinces to women who play active roles at all levels of agricultural life, on a variety of agricultural subjects. Bearing in mind the problems confronted by rural women, 35 all women Agricultural Development Cooperatives have been founded.

It is vital that government administrators who serve in rural areas and are in direct contact with women have a gender perspective. From this point of view, Gender Equality Training programs were delivered in 2009 by my Ministry to the civil servants at the Provincial/District Directorates of Agriculture and Public Education with a view to promoting the empowerment of women in rural areas. 771 trainees attended these programs.

I believe that all these efforts, will be instrumental in the removal of the obstacles confronting rural women provided that the cooperation between all of the relevant parties is continued with increasing enthusiasm..

Before concluding, let me share information on Turkey's two most recent efforts for the global promotion and protection of women rights.

First, the resolution tabled by Canada, Peru and Turkey which seeks to designate October 11 as the International Day of the Girl Child was adopted by consensus on 19 December 2011 in General Assembly. Turkey believes that the International Day of the Girl Child could help raise awareness on the struggles that girls across the world face every day, including discrimination, violence, and barriers in access to health, education, and the challenges of everyday life.

Second, a piece of good news I wish to share with you is that Turkey was first to sign and ratify in its Parliament, 'The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence' –“The Istanbul Convention”. The Istanbul Convention is this first international instrument on violence against women. We should promote the universal ratification of this Convention. The side- event we have co-organized with UN Women and the Council of Europe yesterday was a successful step towards this objective.

In concluding, I would like to extend my greetings to all the delegations, with the hope that the national practices to be shared and negotiations to be made during the 56<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women contribute favorably to promotion and protection of women rights and in particular, to the empowerment of women in the rural area.

Thank you.

