



United Kingdom Mission  
to the United Nations  
New York

One Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza  
(885 Second Avenue)  
New York, NY 10017

Mailing Address:  
PO Box 5238  
New York, NY 10150-5238

Telephone: (212) 745-9200  
Fax: (212) 745-9316

E-mail: [uk@un.int](mailto:uk@un.int)

Statement by

**HER EXCELLENCY MS. LYNNE FEATHERSTONE,  
UK MINISTER OF EQUALITIES**

The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and  
hunger eradication, development and current challenges

**FIFTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

New York

28 February 2012

Check against delivery



**DRAFT**  
**Statement by the UK Government**

The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges

Madam Chairperson

The UK aligns itself with the statement delivered by Denmark on behalf of the European Union.

Firstly, let me congratulate you on your election as Chair of the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women. I also take this opportunity to thank Madame Bachelet for her work at the helm of UN Women. The establishment of UN Women was a landmark for the United Nations. My Government is a very strong supporter of UN Women and we are committed to working with you to support gender equality and women's empowerment across the world.

We welcome this important dialogue focusing on the contribution of and challenges faced by women living in rural areas, including in the poorest countries.

Women are central to developing successful economies and stable societies. The empowerment of women, including through economic independence, is critical to the eradication of poverty. In more developed countries, by focusing on the needs and potential of women entrepreneurs we can maximise the contribution they make to national growth.

We have a number of measures underway in the UK, including in England making funding available to support women in rural areas to start up and stay in business; in Scotland as part of a wider rural programme working with women to increase their business skills; and in Northern Ireland Invest NI promotes female entrepreneurship and supports new and established women-owned businesses and women in management positions by providing information, encouragement, ideas and business connections through networking opportunities.

Agriculture is an important driver for national growth and international development, poverty reduction and food and nutrition security. Smarter investments in rural women, including poor smallholders, can significantly strengthen the impact of agriculture. This benefits the women themselves and their families and strengthens entire economies and societies.

The empowerment of rural girls and women is essential for global prosperity, achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals and ensuring safer, more stable societies. That is why we have put girls and women at the heart of our development programme.



In addition to other goals, our international 'We Will' commitments include:

- helping 18 million women to access financial services;
- saving 250,000 newborn babies;
- enabling over 10 million women to access to modern methods of family planning; and
- working in at least 15 countries to prevent violence against girls and women.

We know that supporting girls to delay their first pregnancy and enabling women to choose whether, when and how many children they have is critical for women and girls' empowerment. A priority for the UK in 2012 is to support partner countries to achieve universal access to family planning in order to meet women's needs, contribute to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 and broader health and development goals.

Last year I was appointed as Ministerial Champion for tackling Violence against Women and Girls. Violence against women and girls is not only an abuse of human dignity; it negatively affects their ability to take full advantage of opportunities. Three elements are crucial to tackling violence against women and girls: leadership at national and international level in challenging social attitudes and strengthening legal frameworks; support for women's participation as politicians and leaders and for women's movements; and promoting women's rights, security and access to justice. I am pleased to see that it is the priority theme for next year's meeting.

We must work together to ensure that rural girls and women globally can realise their rights and fulfil their potential. And we must continue to celebrate the great strides already taken by girls and women throughout the world. I look forward to paying special tribute to this on International Women's Day on 8 March.

Thank you