

Statement by Asia Pacific Women's Watch on behalf of the Asia Pacific Region to the 56th Session of the United Nations Commission on the status of women.

Madam Chair,

We make **this** statement on behalf of the **Asia Pacific Regional Caucus** which is home to 60% of the world's women.

The Asia Pacific Regional Caucus acknowledges the **complexity and dynamism** of women who live in rural contexts and that strategies to address rural women's issues should be based on women's empirical realities. We also acknowledge the role of Indigenous women as traditional caretakers of the land and resources.

As we head towards the Rio +20 Summit now is the time to review, re-evaluate, re-strategise and strengthen the situation of women from all ages in this region. Women face enormous and complex challenges within the framework of climate change and disasters, including, food insecurity, unemployment, property rights, access to credit and nuclear disaster.

Rural women in the region continue to face gender related inequities which are rooted in structural oppression through class, caste, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ethnicity, among other factors. **Inequalities and discrimination** in women and girls' access to education, nutrition and health services, sexual and reproductive health services, decision making, access to and control over information and communication, land, water, fishing resources and other productive resources, impede women's opportunities for decent work, and full participation in public life. Discrimination against women with disabilities and the elderly is a great concern in the region. There is great urgency for inclusion of women in political decision making at all levels

Poverty is heavily concentrated in rural areas. Marginal resource allocation for implementing global and national policy commitments on rural development and the long-term neglect of the agricultural sector are also impeding factors for rural women's poverty alleviation. Rural development strategies are negatively affected by neo-liberal globalisation in terms of commercialisation of the agricultural sector, liberalisation of trade and commoditisation of food and other agricultural products. Women are time-burdened doing unpaid work to provide the basic needs for the family. The needs of the elderly rural women go unnoticed and not addressed, yet they are the bulk of the rural poor women in the region.

Violence against women and girls across all geographic and demographic areas continues to be a major concern. There are increasing reports of FGM, sorcery killings, witch hunting, honor killings, acid throwing cases, homophobic attacks, child marriages, trafficking, rape as an instrument of war and militarization in all forms. New and pervasive forms of violence are emerging alongside new media and technology with cyber bullying for those who have access.

We call upon states for specific measures to ensure economic, social and political empowerment of all women, including access to public goods, legal and social protection and public investment in physical and social infrastructure.

We **call** upon states to recognize **women's critical contribution to rural development** and, their rights and priorities in legal frameworks, national and local development policies and investment strategies at all levels.

Thank You.