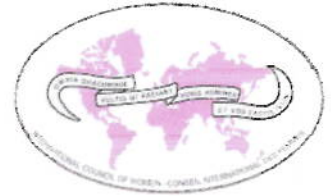


Oral Statement Submitted by International Council of Women
to the 56th Commission on the Status of Women on 5th March 2012



Madam Chair, distinguished delegates.

The International Council of Women, an umbrella of National Councils of Women is a non-governmental organization representing millions of women from more than sixty countries. We thank you for this opportunity to present this oral Statement.

We applaud the Commission for focusing on the empowerment of rural women at this 56th session and on the many challenges they face such as poverty and hunger eradication.

We urge the Commission to give due consideration to the recommendations from this session and use them as a basis to form a strong framework in the support of the empowerment of rural and grassroots women as agents of change.

With this in mind, ICW-CIF requests that UN WOMEN and Member States focus on the following issues:

1. Statistics worldwide show that violence and discrimination against women and girls is higher in rural areas than urban. Therefore men and boys should also be included in training programmes.
2. Education is a Human Right for girls and boys. In rural areas girls drop out of basic education with the result of no school, no scholarship. Available and free education is the key-stone to the empowerment of women and girls for the rest of their life.
3. Rural women, as essential food producers, are central to a sustainable economy. Women's land ownership and inheritance rights improve productivity and will reduce poverty and hunger. The taking over of land, so called land-grabbing by large companies, should be monitored and reported.
4. Financial obstacles for women, as seen in access to credit and market places, are well-documented challenges for rural women. The right to a good communication system, such as mobile phones, can upgrade the efficiency of their businesses and so reduce poverty and hunger.
5. The effects of changing climate, rising sea levels and natural disasters will have the effect of migration of families, so called environmental refugees. Rural families, especially women and children, are the most affected because they lose their land. UN WOMEN and Member States are called upon to give full support in resettlement.

As we oversee these five issues of concern we conclude: **Women are Agents of Change.**

Thank you for your attention.