

Joint Oral Statement of the Young Women's Caucus

Despite recent attention to their role in development, young rural women and girls continue to experience rights violations, gender inequality, and exclusion from many of the gains made under the Millennium Development Goals. More urgent action is needed.

Safe, affordable and quality formal and non-formal education facilitates the empowerment of girls and young women. Access to safe and quality education enables young rural women to obtain skills and knowledge for economic empowerment and also equips them with the skills needed to break the escalating cycle of gender inequality by strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Child marriage is just one human rights violation, for example, that continues to hinder rural women's levels of empowerment but can be eradicated by the institution of safe, quality and continuing education.

The Young Women's Caucus calls for greater investment in school buildings and infrastructure, authentic curriculum, more incentives for quality teachers in rural communities and legislative measures to ensure that girls stay in school. This will facilitate empowerment of the individual woman and also enhance the political health, labour participation rates and the economic and spiritual wellbeing of communities and nations.

Young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights must be protected through direct legislation and all young women have the right to comprehensive sexuality education. This extends beyond biology and anatomy to include information on gender inequality; sexuality; reproductive health and rights; human, physical and emotional development; body image; contraceptive methods; sexually transmitted diseases including HIV; harmful traditional practices; healthy relationships and decision-making.

The Young Women's Caucus calls for increased measures to support the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, including those that combat female genital mutilation and eliminate early and forced

marriages. We also call for young women's access, particularly in rural areas, to adequate health services, including maternal health provision and comprehensive sexuality education.

Young women must be involved and represented in all levels of politics and policy making. This includes as members of parliaments, representatives in advisory groups for policy development, and in the implementation and evaluation of policy. It is only through significant improvements in the levels of representation and participation of young women in these processes that programs will be truly responsive. Young women must be recognised and included as decision makers, and not just considered as victims or recipients of assistance.

The Young Women's Caucus calls for increased efforts to include young women in politics and policy making processes and ensure that the views of young women are represented and considered across all government and intergovernmental activity. It must be recognised that significant barriers exist for young women in rural areas to have their views heard, and we strongly encourage the implementation of strategies to engage with these young women.

Young women are one of the most powerful driving forces to improve lives and transform communities, and we deserve better.

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.