



HOLY SEE

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Statement by the Holy See Delegation

**Economic and Social Council
56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**On Item 3 (a)(i):
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”**

New York, 5 March 2012

Madame Chair,

In addressing the priority theme for this session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), it is important to recognize that rural women make up a large portion of the world's population. The particular challenges they face are well documented: hunger in general and poverty in particular, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges (E/CN.6/2012/3, 5), remain a massive and predominantly rural phenomenon.

Rural women oftentimes work in deplorable situations against odds that defy imagination. Long hours of unpaid work, unhygienic situations, poor nutrition, lack of access to water, limited access to healthcare, discrimination and exposure to violence, including against pregnant mothers, are just some of the challenges many of them face. Mention must also be made of the rural-to-urban or international migration that is sometimes, as rightly noted in the report of the Secretary-General, the only viable option for rural women. While this may be a real opportunity for some of them, for others it may result in exploitation and abuse linked to their vulnerability as migrants (cf., E/CN.6/2012/3, 47, 49).

All these challenges impact on their ability to care for themselves, their children and their family.

Rural women are often the caregivers in the family and the broader community. The negative consequences of neglected children, born and unborn, and the family--the natural and fundamental group unit of society (cf., Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16, 3)--are far reaching. Improving the lives of rural women will therefore assist their family, the community and society as a whole.

Madame Chair,

Poverty and hunger are brought about to a large degree by unfair social and political systems that perpetuate inequality, where women are deprived of legal rights and a voice in decisions that affect them.

Education and training, the provision of resources, service delivery, access to financial systems and communication technology are just some areas which demand ongoing attention as they lead to realization of the right to development (cf., Declaration on the Right to Development, Article 8, 1).

The cooperation and involvement of men, especially in the form of joint initiatives by both men and women to overcome prejudice and implement policies, is crucial to an authentic human-centered approach, one which respects fully the inherent dignity of the human person, an essential component to prevailing over the challenges faced by rural women and indeed all women.

Madame Chair,

My delegation welcomes ongoing reflection on the essential role of women in society. Women, and in particular rural women, should be given the recognition that is due to them and they should be able to make an impact on the world around them.

The present session of the CSW provides an opportunity for experiences to be shared and best practices to be developed. Full respect must be accorded to the dignity of women, which is grounded in the very nature of being human and from which flow both rights and responsibilities.

Both international and national stakeholders are called to contribute positively towards policy development to enable women who are suffering to be freed from oppressive circumstances.

The upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), to be held in Rio de Janeiro this June, will provide another opportunity to strengthen the attention on rural persons, including women and girls, and to increase their engagement in policymaking processes for building sustainable societies. Indeed, in the words of the Secretary General: "Rural women are powerful agents and participants in sustainable development who can implement sustainable solutions to address the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation" (cf., E/CN.6/2012/3, 21, 62).

Madame Chair,

The Secretary-General rightly indicated in his report that the advancement of rural women and girls is an essential part of the solution to today's most serious global challenges (cf., E/CN.6/2012/3, 23). In this regard, my delegation cannot fail to bring attention to food security, poverty eradication and the central role of the family for integral development.

For its part, the Holy See remains committed to protecting the weakest and the poorest members of society and contributing to the common good of all.

Thank you, Madame Chair.