

**STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT OBSERVER OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM) TO  
THE 56<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Priority Theme:** “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”

**New York, March 05, 2012**

Madame Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) appreciates having the opportunity to take part in this important debate. We welcome this year’s priority theme on the empowerment of rural women, and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges, and would like to offer our comments on the topic. We would like to make the following three points on the effects of migration on rural women and girls.

*First*, through migration women living in rural areas can face either increased empowerment or increased vulnerability. Rural women may face increased autonomy following the migration of a spouse, which in turn presents greater opportunities for changing gender stereotypes. The achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women in rural areas are some of the most significant measures in the process of reducing poverty because women constitute a critical mass in generating development. Respect for women's rights and the prevention of violence against them are essential to allow women to play this pivotal role.

Migration can contribute to the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication in several ways – be it for the benefit of migrant women or, in a broader context, for all women in the countries of origin. Women migrants make a significant economic contribution through their labour, both to their countries of destination and, through remittances, to their countries of origin. In societies where women’s power to move autonomously is limited, the act of migration is in itself empowering. It stimulates change in women migrants themselves, and in the societies which send and receive them. Beyond their economic contribution, women migrants are a main source of physical and emotional support for older and younger family members. Women’s voluntary migration is a powerful force for positive change and that is why no effort must be spared in optimizing its positive effects.

At the same time though, rural women may be left particularly vulnerable when the male head-of-household migrates. In addition to realizing their reproductive and domestic roles, rural women may face an increase in their workload as they are also expected to

fulfil farming activities and financial management roles. The pressure to sustain multiple social functions can have a significant impact on family and gender dynamics.

Moreover, male out-migration can limit women to informal and sometimes precarious income generating activities. Women often lack economic opportunities in the absence of men, which can lead to increased risks of poverty and vulnerability, and high economic dependency on remittances.

For rural women's own migration, access to information is particularly important, especially in the prevention of human trafficking. Women in rural areas have less access to information on migration processes and channels, which can increase their risk to unregulated recruitment agencies or smugglers. In certain countries, women from rural areas and poor backgrounds are targeted by brokers to enter into transnational marriage migration. In many cases, young women enter into marriage with foreign men knowing very little about their future spouses. This lack of information can have dramatic consequences on their lives after migration.<sup>1</sup> It is important to sensitize communities to the risks of irregular migration and to the threat of human trafficking, as IOM does through its information campaigns in schools and youth clubs, specifically targeting women and girls.

*Second*, and as noted in the Secretary-General's Report, although rural women tend to be the major recipient of remittances and can sometimes benefit from greater status within their households and communities in this role as managers of remittances, findings suggest that most of the remitted money is spent on consumption and not necessarily for productive purposes. This may be related to rural women's particularly limited access to productive resources, which can hinder their ability to save and invest remittances. Access to resources is often a challenge for rural women, whether they be financial resources such as getting credit, or lack of training, access to technology and information. Therefore, incentives for targeted financial advice to rural women need to be provided to remittance-receiving households as well as investment in the local economy.

*Third*, climate change and environmental degradation are likely to affect rural men and women in different ways. Environmental pressures exacerbate pre-existing problems and accentuate underlying social fault lines. Economically and socially marginalized groups, including rural women, will be affected the most. In the case of rural women, in particular, as climate change continues to significantly contribute to water insecurity, the daily workload of women involved in subsistence farming will increase. They will spend more time and effort on land preparation, crop watering and harvesting.

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<sup>1</sup> "Global Eye" article by June

Lee: [http://www.nationalworkinggroup.org/system/datas/81/original/Global\\_Eye\\_on\\_Human\\_Trafficking\\_Oct\\_2010.pdf?1288784819](http://www.nationalworkinggroup.org/system/datas/81/original/Global_Eye_on_Human_Trafficking_Oct_2010.pdf?1288784819)

Madame Chair,

To conclude, Madame Chair, IOM calls for greater attention to the issues facing women living in rural areas, either dealing with the absence of male out-migration or as migrants themselves. IOM is committed to working to assist and protect the most vulnerable and remains dedicated to working resourcefully and effectively with governments and other partners to this end.

I Thank You.

