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**STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF ECOSOC,
H.E. MR. HAMIDON ALI (MALAYSIA)
AT THE GLOBAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR 2010 AMR**

**“WHO FEEDS THE WORLD IN 2010 AND BEYOND?-RURAL WOMEN
AS AGENTS OF CHANGE AND CHAMPIONS OF GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY”**

22 APRIL 2010

Honourable Minister,
Distinguished Panellists,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to welcome you all to this preparatory meeting for ECOSOC's 2010 Annual Ministerial Review, which will focus this summer on the theme of “Implementing the agreed goals and commitments as regards gender equality and women's empowerment”. I would, in particular, like to thank those of you that have made the trip to New York to be here today for this important discussion on the important role rural women play in promoting food security and reducing global poverty.

Women play a critical role in rural economies. In most parts of the developing world, they participate in crop production and livestock care, provide food, water and fuel for their families, and engage in off-farm activities to diversify their family's income. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, women produce up to 80% of basic foodstuffs, and it is estimated that in Southeast Asia, women account for up to 90% of the labour that goes into rice cultivation. However, many toil away without receiving any recognition or reward for their efforts.

Women have only limited access to critical resources such as drinking water, electricity, and access to infrastructure such as railways and roads, and large numbers of rural women and girls are not enrolled in school. They also lack equitable access to decision-making processes, meaning their voices are not heard. Lack of access to proper healthcare, to social security programmes, and to credit and loans, puts them at a huge disadvantage. High food prices as a

result of the food and energy crises have had a devastating impact on women, as have the effects of climate change and the global economic crisis.

Let me speak briefly about my own country Malaysia, where women comprise 48.74 % of the rural population. The majority of women in the labour force are involved in agriculture-based industries, followed by manufacturing, professional services and sales. Malaysia has taken steps to support women in rural areas, including recognition of the need for simple machines, which are gender friendly, to enhance women's roles in the work place, and action to increase participation of rural women at decision-making level. Also, courses and training have been conducted by various agencies such as the Department of Women Development, the Ministry of Rural Development and the Department of Agriculture to build the skills or capacity of rural women. In addition, measures to improve their access to knowledge, particularly ICT literacy, and to enhance their motivation and leadership ability have been put in place. Gender sensitization courses for policy makers, programme implementers and community leaders, have also been conducted by the Department of Women Development and the Institute of Public Administration (INTAN).

Distinguished participants,

There is no question that women are agents of change and must be supported in this fundamental role if we are to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the MDGs. This was the Council's message in its Ministerial Declaration of 2003 in which it called for an enhanced role for rural women at all levels of rural development. More recently, several high-level meetings have continued to emphasize the importance of the role of rural women; yet an added impetus is needed to translate all of these earlier commitments into concrete action.

I believe this meeting today can serve an important purpose-namely, for all of the various stakeholders present here today: Member States, UN organizations, civil society- including non-governmental organizations, academia and others- to engage in an in-depth conversation of possible ways to turn existing commitments aimed at empowering rural women, into concrete action *at all levels*, including focussing on what has worked, as well as the areas where efforts can be scaled-up and best practices replicated. I believe this will contribute in an important way to this year's ECOSOC high-level segment, as well as through the Council, to the MDG Summit to be held in September. The momentum generated could continue further when the Council's subsidiary body, the Commission on the Status of Women, addresses the topic of rural women in the Spring of 2012. I strongly feel that this meeting provides a springboard for action in support of rural women's rights and empowerment, and I look forward to our deliberations today.
