

15 October 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,  
President of the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
on the occasion of the International Day of Rural Women**

On the occasion of the International Day of Rural Women, I reaffirm the critical role and contribution of rural women, including indigenous women, in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty.

Rural women are the backbone of the economy and society in many countries. They produce a significant amount of the food in developing countries and play an important role in environmental sustainability. Their contribution to poverty eradication and towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals is significant.

But more needs to be done to harness the contribution of rural women to development. Currently there is a gender gap in agriculture, linked to women's weaker access to land rights, modern technologies and financing. If women farmers had stronger legal rights and greater business opportunities, millions of people would be better fed.

I therefore encourage Member States, the United Nations system and civil society to continue their efforts to improve the situation and living conditions of rural women, to enhance their quality of life and assist them in achieving the conditions necessary for sustainable development in the rural areas. I welcome the Commission on the Status of Women's consideration of the "Empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges" as its priority theme during its fifty-sixth session in 2012.

Additionally, in the context of the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio next year, I encourage the international community to pay due attention to the potential of rural women to contribute to sustainable development.

As we mark this International Day, I reiterate to all Member States and partners that prioritizing gender equality and women's empowerment is one of the United Nations' fundamental objectives. Let us continue to work together towards this important goal.