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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”

Statement submitted by New Japan Women’s Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

Statement

Since its founding in 1962, New Japan Women's Association has been working for the abolition of nuclear weapons, the rights of women and children, and solidarity of women around the world for peace. As a non-governmental organization (NGO) in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, the Association has attended the United Nations world conferences on women and sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women. With more than 150,000 members working on the ground, it commits itself to the promotion of the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and all other international agreements on gender equality and women's rights at the international, regional and national levels.

A 9.0 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami that struck the north-east of Japan on 11 March 2011 and the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant devastated human lives, livelihoods and homes. We would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to the United Nations, Governments, NGOs and all individuals for their support and encouragement to the people of Japan, particularly those who suffered immense damage in Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures in the Tohoku region.

The disaster left 20,000 people dead or missing. The Fukushima nuclear accident was assessed at level 7 according to the international nuclear and radiological event scale, and there is still no prospect of stabilizing it. Anxieties over radioactive contamination are widespread. Community reconstruction and decontamination will remain long-term challenges of top priority for Japan, and it is necessary to involve women and to incorporate gender perspectives into all decision-making processes.

In the affected region where major industries are agriculture and fisheries, municipalities are facing rapid ageing and depopulation. Regarding the priority theme of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges", New Japan Women's Association would like to make an input from a viewpoint of reconstruction challenges based on its experience.

Impact of a major disaster on rural areas: challenges posed by the Great East Japan Earthquake and the nuclear accident

The total cost of the damage caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and the nuclear accident is estimated at about \$9.3 billion. The damage to agriculture and fishing totals about \$26 billion. Most of the devastated farmland has been left untouched.

In Miyagi prefecture, where 11 per cent of the cultivated acreage was damaged, only about 30 per cent has been restored, and many farmers are considering giving up farming. In coastal areas, many women had been working at seafood processing factories and shops, but their safety and whereabouts are unknown. It has been reported that women temporary workers at day-care centres or school kitchens were dismissed after the disaster. Gender-disaggregated statistics should be collected regarding the employment situation in the disaster areas.

The disaster of 11 March demonstrated that State policies to abandon primary industries and to force municipal mergers and public worker downsizing, as well as the integration and reduction of medical institutions, resulted in aggravating the damage and delaying the relief and rescue work. Japan's lag in gender equality as indicated by the Global Gender Gap Index (ranked 98th among 135 countries in 2011, and women's representation in Parliament is 11.3 per cent) has been reflected in the lack of gender-sensitive response to disaster and reconstruction.

In the three disaster-hit prefectures, the population ageing rate (2009) and total fertility rate (2008) were 26.8 per cent and 1.39 in Iwate; 22.1 per cent and 1.29 in Miyagi; and 24.7 per cent and 1.52 in Fukushima. While the area covered by each municipality had become much wider owing to municipal mergers, the number of municipal staff, including firefighters, had been cut by 10 to 25 per cent and there were fewer public hospitals. Some of the schools in the region were not earthquake-resistant and therefore were unavailable as evacuation facilities, owing to the budget cuts.

In evacuation facilities, people were living in stressful conditions, with poor nutrition, owing to the prolonged evacuation, women rarely had dressing rooms, and stockpiles were inadequate in responding to special needs of the socially vulnerable, including women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Evacuation facilities were mostly run by men, which made it difficult for women to voice their needs. The evacuees have started to move into temporary housing, but concern grows over a possible increase in violence and abuse against women living in poor conditions with no prospect of getting back to ordinary life.

The participation of women in disaster prevention in Japan is low. The Government's Reconstruction Design Council has only 1 woman out of its 15 members; the Council's study group has 2 women out of its 19 members; and the Committee on the Investigation of Accidents at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station has 2 women out of its 10 members.

Empowerment of rural women: from the perspectives of disaster prevention and reconstruction

New Japan Women's Association calls on the Governments gathering at the fifty-sixth session to:

- Empower rural women by accelerating the implementation of international agreements and instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol thereto, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of its follow-up processes, so as to realize de facto equality in women's daily lives. The implementation of the Convention is particularly important in rural areas, where traditional practices and gender-based stereotypes remain deeply rooted. Note should be taken of the General Statement on Rural Women of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, adopted on 19 October 2011
- Promote economic empowerment of rural women, through measures to guarantee equal opportunity in education and training and to support women's entrepreneurship. It is also important to ensure women's equal participation in all the decision-making processes, with the involvement and cooperation of women engaged in rural industries, producers' organizations and NGOs working on the ground

- Take measures to reduce the burden on women in unpaid care work in the family and community; while promoting an equal share of responsibilities by women and men, enhance social support, including improved care facilities and public transportation
- Ensure lifelong health for rural women through establishing health survey and health check systems and promoting sex education based on science and reproductive health and rights
- Recognize that the advancement of women farmers cannot be achieved unless they are able to live by farming; establish agricultural price guarantees and income compensation systems; and promote decent work both in agriculture and non-agricultural jobs
- With the global food crisis anticipated, promote agricultural policy based on food sovereignty principles to increase food self-sufficiency; establish international rules banning speculation on food and revise free trade agreements that increase poverty and the gap between rich and poor
- Revise structural adjustment and budget policies that promote privatization, deregulation and liberalization of trade and capital flows, and increase State investment in social security, public services and rural infrastructure
- Prioritize measures to protect the vulnerable, including women, from being exposed to sexual violence and other human rights violations and disadvantages, giving special attention to securing information transmission, goods distribution and safe evacuation facilities; and make disaster readiness plans with the involvement of women and gender perspectives
- Integrate gender sensitivity and sustainable community building in the processes of recovery from and reconstruction after disaster. Privatization, deregulation and entry of big businesses in the name of reconstruction will have a destructive impact on local industries, hindering women's empowerment; promote reconstruction so as to benefit and stimulate the local economy and to preserve the community bond and identity, focused on the restoration of jobs and people's livelihoods
- In order also to prevent the frequent occurrence and aggravation of natural disasters, accelerate the implementation of measures to deal with climate change; learn from the various practices already under way in rural areas related to renewable energy sources such as solar light, wind power, small hydroelectric generation and biomass; and reconsider national energy policy to achieve a sustainable society
- Translate Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and its follow-up resolutions into practice; make national action plans; and change State security policies into policies centred on conflict prevention, war eradication and human security
- Fulfil obligations under Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations by drastically cutting military spending to redirect the resources to meet human needs, including the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.