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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 United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries, 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

The United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries is a global mission agency that has 11 million members, 800,000 of whom are directly involved in justice for women through the Women's Division, which supports programmes related to women, children and youth in more than 100 countries around the world. Staff in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean work with grass-roots women in leadership development, education, income generation and gender equality. Their work with rural women contributes to our understanding of current needs and realities.

We affirm the promotion of gender equality and justice from a human rights perspective.

We welcome discussion of the needs and rights of rural women around the world. Rural women in all regions cite lack of access to critical resources, including health care, education, transportation, rural economic development, personal security and other concerns. These access issues must be understood within the larger context of systemic global trends.

Macroeconomic policy

Unfair economic, trade and finance policies have led to the privatization of the public sector, a shift from small- to large-scale agriculture, a focus on agricultural exports over food sovereignty, a focus on debt repayment over domestic needs, emphasis on resource exploitation over environmental protection, and a focus on free trade over the protection of key natural resources and local markets. These policies, promoted by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development nations, have led to a concentration of land in corporate hands with a focus on exports. The results have been massive displacement and the loss of livelihoods for small farmers.

Climate change

The failure of nations, particularly developed nations, to address their fossil fuel consumption has devastating consequences, particularly for rural women. Increases in the price of oil drive up the costs of agricultural production. The drive for "alternative fuels" shifts agriculture from food to biofuels. Both factors drive up the cost of food for millions and lead to increased hunger and poverty. An intensification of climate change due to fossil fuel consumption is leading to dramatic rural dislocation as a result of floods, drought, hurricanes, tornadoes and other extreme weather, undermining rural economies. Women and girls who stay in rural communities must travel farther for necessities such as water, which places them at greater risk of violence and increases their work.

War

Conflict, including intense resource wars for the domination of agricultural lands, water and fossil fuels, has caused massive dislocation for women in rural communities, intensified by abuse and violence against women.

Invisible labour

Women's and girls' production is often intended for consumption in the home. Since this work is unpaid, the illusion that only men provide for the family and that they are more important or superior persists. When economic development opportunities favour men's resources (such as formal employment and property) as eligibility criteria, women are left out and their role in economic development is undermined.

When women find paid work, it is often insecure and unregulated, and they are paid less than men for the same work. Free-market economics encourages production where resources, environments and labour can be exploited without direct consequences for the companies; this creates cycles of poverty, with an unsustainable strain on women and their environment.

Migration, often due to climate change or lack of opportunities in rural communities, creates situations in which women hired in service industries are vulnerable to exploitation. Trafficking for exploitative labour or sexual slavery is a global problem. Also, male migration out of rural communities often leaves women in such communities with the additional burden of caring for the sick and elderly; this caregiving is another form of women's and girls' unpaid work and has a large impact on women in communities weakened by widespread HIV/AIDS.

Lack of infrastructure

Inadequate roads, electricity and communications technology severely limit rural women's mobility, create isolation and have an impact on their options in terms of health care, education, and employment. This is a direct result of decades of privatization measures that have dismantled State public services, as well as structural adjustment policies that have cut public-sector spending on services and infrastructure.

Violence against women

Property-grabbing, wife inheritance, sexual violence and domestic violence undermine women's economic development and security. Owing to a lack of infrastructure, rural women may have even less access to mechanisms of safety and justice. States have the obligation to protect through international human rights law. Frequently, nations offer only superficial commitments to women's needs and rights, doing little to fulfil those commitments. Women's ministries in many countries have limited scope and limited power, which allows States to minimize their commitment to women's equality.

Intersections of identities

Rural women are diverse and face different challenges, depending on their environments and their social status. Women's race, ethnicity, class, national origin, national status, religion, age, marital status and sexual orientation are all significant factors in their ability to enjoy their human rights. For example, indigenous rural women face even greater challenges, since they are often marginalized because of their race or ethnicity (see General Assembly resolution S-23/3, annex, para. 5).

Any efforts to address the immediate concerns of rural women must challenge the unjust macroeconomic policies that have systematically undermined the

livelihoods, food security, access to services, and autonomy of rural women. Efforts must challenge current patterns of consumption that exacerbate climate change and resource wars. Rural women face immediate challenges that must be addressed, yet efforts to meet these challenges are extremely limited in the absence of concerted efforts to address systemic concerns.

Recommendations

We urge Member States to:

- Critically examine “structural adjustment programmes”, poverty reduction strategy papers or other, similar measures that undermine the public sector and basic social services;
- Encourage International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization programmes to prioritize food sovereignty, particularly food grown by women small-scale farmers, over agro-exports and debt repayments;
- Increase the availability and accessibility of fundamental social services, including education, health care, transportation, public-sector jobs and other key public services;
- Address environmental degradation and climate change, particularly through clear commitments on the part of industrialized nations to limiting greenhouse gas emissions and to providing adaptation funding for developing nations at the seventeenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. We call on our own Government to make binding commitments to codifying reductions of greenhouse gas emissions that reduce atmospheric levels of such emissions to below 350 parts per million, and promoting international dialogue and the development of human rights frameworks and procedures that address the challenges that are expected to emerge as climate change permanently displaces large numbers of people and entire nations;
- Engage women as peacemakers (see Security Council resolution 1325 (2000));
- Protect small-scale farms and cooperatives, and create access to finance for women farmers for the improvement of agriculture and better nutrition;
- Make sure that all economic, trade, finance, development and social policies not only are gender-sensitive, but also address the full diversity of women’s lives, particularly regarding race or ethnicity, class, national status, religion, age, marital status and sexual orientation;
- In fulfilment of the commitment set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, national accounts should measure women’s unpaid work. This work should be factored into the real costs of production (see A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1, para. 68 (b));
- Development policies require gender-sensitive investment in rural areas through education, credits, training, increased access to markets, and non-farm employment opportunities. Governments should increase women’s and girls’ access to education, right to own land, right to obtain loans, right to market goods, ability to transport goods, and ability to gain access to agricultural training.