



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-eighth session

10-21 March 2014

**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**

### **Statement submitted by Rural Development Leadership Network, 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.



## Statement

### **Progress by the United States of America on the Millennium Development Goals for Rural Women from 2000 to 2013**

The Rural Development Leadership Network, a national multicultural social change organization based in the United States of America and founded in 1983, supports community-based development in poor rural areas through hands-on projects, education and skills-building, leadership development and networking. We urge United Nations bodies to make sure that poor rural women are able to participate in the deliberations of the United Nations and gatherings of non-governmental organizations, including those of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Today, we are writing also to encourage stronger support for rural women as Governments and non-governmental organizations work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the United States and in the rest of the world.

From 2000 until 2006, the United States economy was gradually improving. Then, in 2007, the country slid suddenly into a great recession, which affected the global economy. In recent years, there have also been negative developments that disproportionately affect poor rural women. New laws that suppress the voting rights of individuals affect rural women especially, because polling stations in rural areas are being closed. Since women often support women candidates, these new laws can reduce the number of women holding office at the national, regional, state and local levels.

Women's reproductive rights have been completely dismantled in many areas and this development can lead to the death of women who attempt non-medical abortions as a result. With medical facilities scarce in many rural areas and with these areas in the United States more likely to be conservative politically, we expect rural women suffer more than their urban sisters. Again, because women still earn less than men overall, and because income levels are lower in rural areas than in metropolitan areas, current efforts to dismantle the minimum wage are likely to affect rural women disproportionately. The Agriculture Heritage Partnership Reauthorization Act of 2013 has not been passed by Congress. Likely reduction in allocation for food stamps threatens to leave millions of families and children hungry.

On the plus side, we are encouraged by the efforts of the United States Government to meet the Millennium Development Goals in other countries through its commitment of millions of dollars for water and sanitation, including scaling up resources in 21 focus countries.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton placed gender equality and women's empowerment at the core of United States foreign policy and diplomatic engagement, establishing the first ever Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues within the State Department. In the fiscal year 2010 budget, the United States Senate appropriated \$2 million towards the Office of Global Women's Issues to integrate gender across all sectors that receive United States foreign assistance.

Other signs of progress in the United States include some legislation that has improved the lives of rural women and other women. The passage of equal pay legislation, called the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, expanded the rights of workers

to sue over pay discrimination. Passage of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 has improved our nation's response to violence, closed critical gaps in services and improved lifesaving services for all victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking, including Native America women, immigrants, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender victims, college students and youth and public housing residents.

Passage of the Affordable Care Act will provide health care to many people who were previously unable to obtain it, although prices may go up for the rural poor. Gains already made through this law include the following:

- A total of 26.9 million women with private health insurance gained expanded preventive services with no cost-sharing, including mammograms, cervical cancer screenings, prenatal care, flu and pneumonia shots, and regular well-baby and well-child visits
- Many health plans now cover additional preventive services with no cost-sharing, including well-woman visits, screening for gestational diabetes, domestic violence screening, breastfeeding supplies and contraceptive services
- A total of 24.7 million women enrolled in Medicare received preventive services without cost-sharing, including an annual wellness visit, a personalized prevention plan, mammograms and bone mass measurement for women at risk of osteoporosis
- A total of 1.1 million women between ages 19 and 25 who would have been uninsured have coverage under their parent's employer-sponsored or individually purchased health insurance plan
- More than 2 million women enrolled in Medicare saved \$1.2 billion in 2011 due to improvements in prescription drug coverage
- Major federal investments in care innovations, such as community health teams, are improving the management of chronic diseases that are prevalent among women

Benefits still to come from this law in 2014 and thereafter include the following:

- An estimated 8.7 million American women currently purchasing individual insurance will gain coverage for maternity services
- Insurance companies in the individual and small group markets will no longer be permitted to charge higher rates due to gender or health status
- A total of 18.6 million uninsured women will have new opportunities for coverage through the health insurance marketplace
- State Medicaid programmes will be able to offer more opportunities to women who need personal assistance or long-term care and wish to stay at home and in the community, rather than enter a nursing home

## Conclusion

The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes that one cause of poverty is women's minimal participation in the decision-making process. Our organization seeks to help improve the lives of rural women through self-help, community

development, education, networking and entrepreneurship. In many cases, new legislation is needed. Above all, we advocate for the voices of rural women to be raised and that poor rural women be included in the decision-making process at the United Nations, including the Commission on the Status of Women and parallel events of non-governmental organizations.

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