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Statement submitted by **Organizzazione Mondiale Degli Agricoltori**, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls

Gender equality and empowerment of rural women and girls are crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goals and food security. As women are responsible for more than half of the food production of the world, food security is impossible to achieve unless special attention is paid to gender equality, as well as, to women's rights. There's a need for equal access to education, finance, land, social security, advisory and other services. Gender equality and women and girls' rights have to be translated into national policies, programmes, investments and adequate human and financial resources. Furthermore, the governments need to monitor the progress towards this goal.

The Women's Committee of World Farmers Organisation (WFO) representing women farmers from all over the world and the Women's Committee of Copa, representing European women farmers, as well as farmers' wives, family member assistants and farmers' daughters, fight for better living and working conditions for women in rural areas worldwide, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment as well as ensuring jobs, growth and the sustainable development of rural areas.

Rural women across the world face numerous challenges on a daily basis. Only together we can find solutions, in particular to tackle climate change, desertification and the ageing population in the countryside. The lack of quality and accessible infrastructure, transport, facilities and services for everyday life in rural areas also impacts the choices that families and women make.

The agricultural sector is key to the vitality of rural areas, enhancing generational renewal, social cohesion and economic growth. Agriculture also contributes to provide safe, nutritious and healthy food, to the diversification of the landscape, to mitigating climate change and to preserve biodiversity and cultural heritage.

Although women farmers and women working in rural areas face similar constraints to women in urban areas, they are also confronted with other difficulties due to the specificities of rural areas.

The Women's Committee of World Farmers Organisation urges UN members and all stakeholders to embrace the opportunities that the rural world can provide. Gender equality is one of the key targets in the Sustainable Development Goals, as it is strictly linked to the food security goal. As achieving food security requires investments, there is no sustainability without investing in the farms as well. We call for better access of women to financial advice and the same access to credit as men. The real development requires equal rights! We also call for the support of entrepreneurial initiatives that will provide extra family income, namely, multifunctional farms (combining agri- and rural tourism, direct marketing, paid social services like care for children and for the elderly, or educational school programmes).

Farmers organizations in many countries indicate that one of the biggest challenges for the future of family farms is the low attraction of farming. Generation renewal can boost all dimension of a sustainable agriculture. The development of agriculture and forestry activities must be in the heart of the new Sustainable Development Goals to ensure the food security, end of poverty, zero hunger and life on land.

Children, both girls and boys, must be able to attend school close to their homes, also in the countryside to ensure that, if they wish, in the future they will be able to continue working in the agricultural sector, developing projects and feel accomplished. The development of farming, proper income and decent living conditions for the farming family will be ensured and young people will be encouraged to take over the farm and to remain in the countryside. Access to education is vital!

Investment in education, adult training, lifelong learning, validation of skills acquired and acquisition of new skills, advisory services and local services are essential to improve life in rural areas and to decrease economic and social isolation. Indeed, one of the elements characterizing rural areas is the lack of access to all those services which represent common facilities for people living in urban centres. Therefore, eliminating the differences on the access to education between rural and urban regions is a crucial to improve gender equality as well.

Financial independence through rural activities combined with training and the willpower of women organizations will also contribute to strengthen rural women participation in networking activities and in the decision making and local policies. These are priorities for the future of rural communities and governments worldwide need to invest and encourage their development.

Demographic change is creating a pressing need for policies that integrate women into the labour force. In particular, if rural women are equally integrated into the labour market and enjoy equal pay, they can help to increase household income, improve living conditions, reduce poverty, and enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals.

Worldwide, agriculture is managed by family farms which are veritable success stories and shared-ownership of farms and agricultural enterprises must be promoted. Family farms are indeed big gains as they bring the principle of the eco-social circular economy to life. This is why we call for a strong social protection of all family members involved in agriculture. Assisting spouses need social protection, including guaranteed support for medical expenses and for cases of illness or work accidents, decent allowances in the event of maternity leave, temporary help in the household, and fair old-age pensions.

In order to help women in rural areas to reconcile a seven-day working week on the farm with the “invisible” family responsibilities, women require better health care, childcare and elderly care, which would thereby boost living conditions.

The future of rural areas and agriculture also very much depends on a high-speed broadband internet connection and the use of new technologies. Internet access will help to overcome isolation, to enhance contact and to encourage the use of e-commerce and platforms facilitated by quality ICT. Entrepreneurial networks must be supported in order to increase women’s empowerment and gender equality and to guarantee living standards equivalent to those living in urban areas.

These opportunities will provide women with the inspiration needed. Women farmers can be at the forefront of innovation and diversification. Women possess special interpersonal and communication skills as well as awareness and knowledge of local needs, contributing to local and community development and strengthening identity.

Many of today’s challenges are international and global. Therefore, we need to set global goals to tackle them. Development is needed everywhere, we can’t demand development and improvement only from the developing world or from the richest countries, but all regions and countries are needed to improve sustainability worldwide.

In family farms, sustainability has always been an appreciated value: we aim to leave the farm and soil to our children in better condition than we got it. “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children,” is a known sentence by everyone and especially clear for the family farmers.

In conclusion, we call on UN Members and stakeholders to promote gender equality policies and to ensure the empowerment of rural women.

The participation of women in the social and economic sphere will create jobs, reduce inequalities, promote gender equality, reduce the risk of poverty, prevent the depopulation of rural areas, and ensure that rural and agricultural activities contribute to biodiversity and sustainable food production.

The UN’s support will make the rural world richer and help implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
