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the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by World Young Women’s Christian 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Women, young women and girls living in rural areas face disproportionate challenges in accessing, claiming and realising their human rights. The effects of poverty, a lack of accessible education, digital technology, health care, sexual reproductive health services, comprehensive sexuality education, land and property rights as well as employment opportunities, create immense barriers for rural women, young women and girls. Discriminatory social norms and patriarchal power structures further increase these barriers and risk leaving rural women, young women and girls behind in efforts to create sustainable development. The majority of rural women, young women and girls around the world continue to live in social isolation and economic underdevelopment and therefore require urgent attention and action by governments.

Even though extreme poverty has declined in the world, a vast majority of people living in poverty are concentrated in rural areas. In these areas, women, young women and girls are disproportionately affected by the poverty due to discriminatory laws, practices and social norms. Rural women, young women and girls substantially lack equal access to land, property, financial support and credit compared to their male counterparts. The majority of the work carried out by rural women, young women and girls remains invisible and unpaid in the form of domestic household chores and family responsibilities.

Social isolation, in combination with the lack of access to public services including education, health care, water and sanitation, results in that rural women, young women and girls are faced with much bigger obstacles than rural men and urban women. Their experiences of poverty, exclusion and the effects of climate change are amplified and exacerbated by their underrepresentation in political decision-making. Environmental degradation has a more immediate and direct effect on women, young women and girls and their livelihoods and health, are more threatened today than ever before by pollution and toxic wastes.

Rural women, young women and girls are furthermore at a higher risk of being exposed to violence in various forms, as their basic need of safety is often jeopardised. When faced with violence within households, also including psychological violence in the form of withholding earned income or identity documents, rural women, young women and girls, are isolated from safe spaces and support. When moving between destinations for basic necessities, such as for fetching food or water, rural women, young women and girls are more likely to be exposed to danger. Living in rural areas also increases the risk of young women and girls being subjected to child, early and forced marriages, as well as their ability to escape such unacceptable practices.

The realisation of the human rights of rural women, young women and girls is further prevented by the fact that there is a general lack of disaggregated data regarding their situation. This prevents their challenges from being monitored and known by decision-makers and furthers the difficulty of implementing solutions. Rural women, young women and girls living with disabilities or who belong to indigenous communities or the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) community, are particularly at risk of facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. It is therefore critical that all actions taken by governments include rural women, young women and girls in all of their diversities.

In line with the priority theme of the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) on the “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”, the World YWCA urges governments and all stakeholders to take urgent action to:

- Address the structural causes of poverty for rural women, young women and girls in all of their diversities, through changes in economic structures and environmental policies to safeguard sustainable ecosystems, and by the promoting women's economic independence through the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices related to economic assets and the inheritance of property and land;
 - ensure that rural women, young women and girls in all of their diversities, have access to productive resources, opportunities and public services including education and health care, sexual reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education;
 - ensure that national transport infrastructures are safe for women, young women and girls in all of their diversities, to use when traveling between rural and urban areas within and between countries;
 - establish and promote education, training and relevant information programmes for rural women, young women and girls in all of their diversities, through affordable and appropriate technologies including mass media and expanded access to internet connection;
 - establish and fund safe spaces for rural women, young women and girls in all of their diversities in their communities to ensure that they have access to supportive, confidential and non-judgmental mentorship and guidance;
 - implement programmes to eliminate harmful traditional practices and stereotypes including, but not limited to child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation in all rural communities;
 - collect, analyse, use and disseminate data on the situation of rural women, young women and girls in all of their diversities, disaggregated by sex, age, geographical location, disability, socio- economic, minority or other status and ensure that such data informs national measures aimed at achieving substantive equality for rural women in all spheres of life; and,
 - allocate funding for rural women, young women and girls in all of their diversities, to be able to participate meaningfully in local, national, regional and global forums to advocate for their human rights and inform decisions affecting them.
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