

**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-six Session**

Priority theme: “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”

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Joint Statement of the UN-Regional Commissions

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished representatives,

Allow me to present to you this joint statement on behalf of the UN Regional Commissions.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The mandate of the regional commissions on women empowerment and gender equality is guided by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the Millennium Declaration, the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), as well as by other regional mandates emanating from its intergovernmental machinery and regional policy frameworks.

The synergies between the global and regional agendas are a clear indication of the need and the importance for the UN system to work coherently and effectively horizontally at the regional level, as well as vertically at the global, regional and national levels.

In this context, the regional commissions are uniquely placed to leverage UN support at the regional level and increase its relevance and impact. Acting as important intergovernmental forums for policy dialogue and cooperation on women’s empowerment and gender equality, the UN regional commissions provide support to governments, including through multidisciplinary analytical work, particularly for mainstreaming gender into all key development sectors. Through close relations with member states, the Commissions serve as platforms for the sharing of experience and ideas at regional and interregional levels. In close collaboration with UN Women, the regional commissions will continue to monitor the implementation of the Global Platform for Action, in coordination with the implementation of the respective regional platforms or plans of action for gender equality.

In the ESCWA region, the regional review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action revealed important achievements in the area of women’s health, education and legal reform. However, women living in rural areas are often marginalized and their rights for equal access to social services, education, justice, are not always fully guaranteed. Many ESCWA countries do not possess adequate infrastructure to guarantee rural women full access to basic services. Currently the “Arab Uprising” sweeping the region can either reinforce women's positions by pushing forward the gender equality agenda, or reverse achieved gains and even deepen inequalities. Transitional times represent a genuine opportunity for policy makers to introduce within the context of constitutional change; legislative reforms to end discrimination and promote women’s full participation in public life.

ESCWA has been providing continuous advisory and technical cooperation services to member states to integrate a gender perspective in national policies and support the full implementation of the CEDAW .

Furthermore, ESCWA is currently establishing an observatory for women in the Arab region that will produce an electronic sex-disaggregated database on the status of women, including rural women in the economic, social, political, cultural and legal fields.

In the ECE region, and in line with the recommendations of the Beijing +15 Regional Review Meeting, UNECE's activities have focused on enhancing women's economic independence, specifically through supporting women's entrepreneurship including in rural areas. To this end, UNECE provided a platform for policy dialogue and exchange through a number of events, conducted research on the gender gaps in entrepreneurship, including differences in rural areas in Central Asia and strengthened capacity for women entrepreneurs in Central Asia through targeted workshops.

In 2010-2011, two assessments of the business environment for women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan were conducted, covering women in rural areas as well as in urban and drawing conclusions on specific evidence-based policy recommendations which were discussed at national workshops. In addition, at several high level meetings, including the international Policy Seminar on women's entrepreneurship development in Central Asia, participants identified gender gaps, including in rural areas and discussed policy measures needed to increase women's economic opportunity in the region.

In the ECLAC region, in rural areas of Latin America, the percentage of women without income reached 38%, compared with 14% of men. Studies of wage gaps in the region also demonstrate that rural and indigenous women are disadvantaged due to structural relations of gender inequality in access to the labor market, type of occupation and income. At the eleventh session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Brasilia in 2010, ECLAC member states approved the Brasilia Consensus with a commitment to "develop policies that favour the settlement of rural women and rural employment in areas undergoing productive restructuring and to ensure that mechanisms needed to implement them are in place", in addition to a number of other commitments relating to rural women.

ECLAC, through the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, collects data to monitor the situation of rural women including on women without income of their own, an indicator constructed specifically for this purpose using data from household surveys collected in 17 countries. Additionally ECLAC is working on a study on time-use of rural women comparing data in Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico, and a regional study on territorial development and empowerment of rural women together with UN-Women.

In the ESCAP region, in Asia-Pacific, the benefits of recent economic growth have not been equitable between countries and between rural and urban areas within countries with substantial remaining challenges for social inclusion and, in particular, women's overrepresentation amongst those living in poverty. Thus, ESCAP continues to support the regional implementation of the Bangkok Declaration on Beijing +15 and other international gender equality commitments, with a particular focus on the economic empowerment of women living in poverty within marginalized, primarily rural, contexts. To that end, ESCAP has recently initiated multi-country projects aimed at strengthening capacity and partnerships for gender mainstreaming for women's economic empowerment towards the achievement of MDG 1 within development policy and programme planning at national, provincial and subnational levels. It is also substantially increasing its efforts towards mainstreaming gender across all areas of ESCAP work, with a special focus on macroeconomic policy and LDCs, which are crucial for the empowerment of rural women within poverty elimination strategies and for the setting of related priorities in national public

spending. In addition, ESCAP focuses upon promoting the rights of women with disabilities and older women, especially in terms of improved social protection and livelihood opportunities.

In the ECA region, the post Beijing + 15 implementation strategy derived from the Banjul Declaration (2009) defines seven key areas of action in response to several challenges in addressing the empowerment of rural women, including better access to and control of productive assets.

The current work of ECA includes a special focus on land policy and the promotion of women's land rights, through supporting the implementation of the 2009 AU Declaration on Land Issues and Challenges which resolved to strengthen security of land tenure for women. This is reinforced by the ECA, AfDB and AU initiative to support countries to introduce coherence in land policy formulation and implementation through the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa. ECA is also advocating for a stronger focus on women's role in ensuring sustainable food security in the context of climate change, including financing. The special challenges faced by rural based women in conflict and post conflict situations and the need to ensure their effective participation for lasting peace solutions is a key priority for the work of ECA to strengthen responses by member States.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair,

The regional commissions reiterate their commitments to working in close partnership, complementarity and coherence at the regional level with UN Women and other agencies in order to ensure that every part of the UN System maintains its responsibility for contributing to real and enduring results for girls and women on the ground in all societies.

