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PRESENTATION TO CEDAW ON BEHALF OF THE ROME-BASED AGENCIES &  
UN-WOMEN

7 OCTOBER 2013

Good morning, my name is Elisabeth Rasmusson, and I am the Assistant Executive Director of Partnerships & Governance for the World Food Programme. I am pleased to speak to you today on behalf of FAO, IFAD, UN Women and WFP as we open this important discussion on rural women.

Before I speak about our joint support of the preparation of a general recommendation on article 14 of CEDAW on rural women, I want to use this moment to draw your attention to these key facts:

- Of the 1.4 billion extremely poor people in the world – those living on less than USD1.25 per day - 70 per cent live in rural areas ;
- Most of these people depend either completely or partly on agriculture, 43 per cent of whom are women.
- Any discussion about decent work must reflect the burden of unpaid care work. Rural women carry most of the unpaid work burden due to lack of infrastructure and services.
- Over 150 million people would be lifted out of hunger if women had equal access to land, education, tools technologies, credit markets, participation.<sup>1</sup>

FAO, IFAD, UN Women and WFP are committed to achieving a world of equity without hunger. This requires us to address rural women's economic empowerment through the promotion of gender equality and the rights of rural women. By joining forces, we hope to achieve greater and more sustainable results.

We believe that addressing the persistent gender inequalities and discrimination experienced by rural women requires eliminating structural factors that cause and reproduce these inequalities in the

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<sup>1</sup> 2011 State of Food and Agriculture: <http://www.fao.org/sofa/gender/en/>

economic, social and political domains.

There is no question that a General Recommendation on Rural Women is long overdue. The CEDAW Convention was originally adopted in 1979. Over the past 34 years the global landscape has undergone a tremendous change, especially in rural areas. Today, we are joining our voices to support that a General Recommendation considers the status of rural women.

The empowerment of rural women and girls cuts across the mandate of four agencies. It is key to addressing today's global challenges, including food and nutrition insecurity, inequality, poverty and achieving sustainable development.

Empowerment is fundamental also for addressing gender-based violence, which is more acute in rural areas and where harmful practices are more widespread.

This is why we have come together in support of the preparation of a general recommendation on article 14 of CEDAW so that it reflects the reality facing rural women.

We have been working with the CEDAW secretariat to support the preparation of today's general discussion and that of the general recommendation on Article 14 since FAO launched the discussion in 2012. We believe that these discussions and decisions can contribute to significant achievements:

- 1.) The creation of the enabling environment conducive to the achievement of equity between *rural* women and men as well as girls and boys;
- 2.) Rural women advance towards achieving equal access to land, inheritance and property;
- 3.) Opportunities for decent rural employment and livelihood diversification activities for women and girls and equal rights to own productive resources will be increased. Through increasing opportunities for technical, agricultural and vocational education and training, the diversification of rural women's livelihoods will be improved;

- 4.) The empowerment of women to participate in decision making at all levels is supported;
- 5.) Women participate actively in discussions with their rural communities to understand and mitigate the impact of climate change and crisis through resilience-building strategies, including social and health protection schemes;
- 6.) Improved livelihood opportunities can facilitate access to essential services such as safe drinking water, basic sanitation and hygiene, energy, health, including reproductive and sexual health, and social protection;

To achieve these ambitions, we must partner with men and boys to support and champion these positive changes towards the status and condition of rural women. Of course, inherent in achieving gender equality is ensuring women live a life free of violence in all its forms.

Our aim is to call the attention of the reporting member states to the challenges facing rural women and how they can address them. The general recommendation on Article 14 will support us as we provide appropriate and authoritative guidance to States Parties to comply with their obligations to protect, respect and enforce the human rights of rural women.

But this discussion on rural women is not limited to Article 14. In reality, many articles are related to the status of rural women who face discrimination, whether this discrimination is linked to their living conditions in remote areas that are not served by infrastructure, or to their working conditions in agriculture.

Rural women have access to fewer services including education and health, and have fewer opportunities for income and leisure. The impact of poverty and climate change and the weight of discriminatory practices and traditions is borne disproportionately by women in rural areas.

This is why we call for gender to be mainstreamed into all rural, agricultural and development policies, plans and budgets.

Macroeconomic policies, including trade, fiscal and investment policies, must be responsive to the different gender-related needs and opportunities of women and men, and be especially sensitive to their impacts on rural women. We advocate for the elimination of discrimination against rural women in all statutory laws.

We believe that measures must be taken to ensure the participation of rural women and their organizations in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies in this area, including in the budgeting and allocation of financial and natural resources.

In 2012 the Commission on the Status of Women addressed rural women as a priority theme at its 56th session. No outcome was achieved. Negotiations on the draft agreed conclusions on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges concluded without agreement on the text. We therefore welcome the efforts of the Committee to prepare a General Recommendation on rural women.

As I close, I want to emphasize just how important the CEDAW Convention is for improving recognition of the needs of rural women.

The International Land Coalition, where all three Rome based Agencies are members, has started to use the CEDAW Convention in an organized way to promote women's access to land. It has encouraged and supported ILC members in those countries which are up for periodic review, to prepare shadow reports on women and land and present to the Committee.

FAO, IFAD, UN-Women and WFP all firmly believe that CEDAW can and must be a useful and meaningful instrument. It can guide gender-responsive rural development programming and policy formulation planning. A general recommendation should reflect the emerging challenges that can limit a rural woman's capacity to fully enjoy their rights. The recommendation should include clear policy measures that can give practical guidance for policy makers on how to develop policies, strategies and programmes that address these challenges and supports the empowerment of rural women.

We are jointly implementing a programme for the economic empowerment of rural women which draws on each of our agencies comparative advantages in 7 countries. Together we hope to increase the impact of our programmes, than if we were each working alone.

On behalf of the four organizations I would like to confirm that we truly believe that, in policy matters such as the one that brings us together today, as in operational ones, we provide better and more effective service when we act together for the people we serve.

Thank you.