

## Joint Oral Statement of the Young Women's Caucus

Despite recent attention to their role in development, young rural women and girls continue to experience rights violations, gender inequality, and exclusion from many of the gains made under the Millennium Development Goals. More urgent action is needed.

Safe, affordable and quality formal and non-formal education facilitates the empowerment of girls and young women. Access to safe and quality education enables young rural women to obtain skills and knowledge for economic empowerment and also provides them with the skills needed to break the escalating cycle of gender inequality by strengthening respect for fundamental freedoms. Child marriage is just one human rights violation, for example, that contributes to a downward spiral of empowerment, but can be eradicated by the institution of

The Young Women's Caucus calls for greater investment in school buildings, infrastructure, decent curriculum, more incentives for quality teachers, rural economics, and legislative measures to ensure that girls stay in school. This will facilitate empowerment of the individual women and also enhance the political health, labour participation rates and the economic and political health of communities and nations.

Young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights must be protected through legislation and all young women have the right to comprehensive sexuality education. This extends to all young women to include information on gender inequality, sexuality, reproductive health and rights, human rights, physical and emotional development, body images, information on methods of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV, harmful traditional practices, and decision-making.

The Young Women's Caucus calls for legislation to protect the health and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, including those that prohibit female genital mutilation and eliminate early and forced

services. We also call for improved access particularly in rural areas, to essential health services, including maternal health provision and comprehensive sexuality education.

Policy making. This includes as members of policy making. This includes as representatives in advisory groups for policy development and in the implementation of policy. It is not only through advisory groups that the levels of representation and participation of young women in these processes must be enhanced. Young women must be recognised and included as decision makers, and not just considered as victims or recipients of assistance.

The Young Women's Caucus calls for increased efforts to include young women in politics and policy making processes and that the views of young women are represented and considered across all government and non-governmental activities. It must be recognised that significant barriers exist for young women in rural areas who have their voices heard and that they must be encouraged to engage with these processes. The Young Women's Caucus calls for greater investment in school buildings and infrastructure.

Young women are the future of our country. They will shape the lives and transform communities, and we deserve better.

Madam Chair,

We make this statement on behalf of the Asia Pacific Region at Caucus, which is home to 30% of the world's women.

The Asia Pacific Regional Caucus acknowledges the complexity and duration of rural women's issues in rural contexts and that strategies to address rural women's issues must be tailored to the specific needs of the land and resources.

As we head towards the Rio+20 Summit, now is the time to review, re-evaluate, re-strategise and strengthen the education of women from challenges in this region. Women face enormous and complex challenges with a lack of framework for climate change and disaster resilience, food insecurity, unemployment, property rights, access to credit and nuclear disaster.

Rural women in the region continue to face gender-related inequities which are rooted in structural oppression through class, caste, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ethnicity among other factors. Inequalities and discrimination in women and girls' access to education, nutrition and health services, sexual and reproductive health services, decision making, access to and control over information, labour, land, water, fishing, and natural resources and other productive resources impede women's opportunities to decent work and full participation in public life.

Discrimination against women with disabilities and the elderly is a great concern in the region. There is great urgency for inclusion of women in political decision making at all levels.

poverty is heavily concentrated in rural areas. A marginal resource allocation for implementing global and national policy commitments on rural development and the long-term neglect of the agricultural sector are all major impediments to rural women's poverty alleviation. Rural development strategies are negatively affected by neoliberal globalisation in terms of commercialisation of the agricultural sector, liberalisation of trade and the commoditisation of food and other agricultural products. Women are overburdened with unpaid work that provides the basic needs for the family. The needs of the elderly rural women go unnoticed and not addressed, yet they are the bulk of the rural poor women in the region.

Violence against women and girls across all geographic and socio-economic areas continues to be a major concern. There are increasing reports of FGM, sex killings, witch hunting, honor killings, acid throwing cases, homophobic attacks, transphobic attacks, trafficking, rape as an instrument of war and militarization in all forms. New and pervasive forms of violence are emerging alongside new media and technology with cyber bullying for those who have access.

We call upon states for specific measures to ensure economic, social and political empowerment of women and girls. We call upon states to increase public investment in rural infrastructure.

We call upon states to recognize women's critical contribution to rural development and, their needs and priorities in policy frameworks, national and local development policies and investment strategies at all levels.

Thank you.