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Statement by the Holy See Delegation

**Economic and Social Council
56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**On Item 3 (a)(i):
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”**

New York, 5 March 2012

Madame Chair,

In addressing the specific challenges of rural women, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), it is important to recognize that rural women constitute a large portion of the world's population. The particular challenges they face are well documented: hunger, poverty and poverty in particular, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General, the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty, and hunger eradication, development and gender challenges (E/CN.6/2012/3, 5), remain a massive and predominantly rural phenomenon.

Rural women often work in deplorable conditions, and suffer from a lack of imagination. Long hours of manual work, unhygienic conditions, poor nutrition, lack of access to limited access to healthcare, discrimination and exposure to violence, including against pregnant mothers, are just some of the challenges many of them face. Attention must also be made of the rural-to-urban or international migration that is sometimes, as rightly noted in the report of the Secretary-General, the only viable option for rural women. While this may be a real opportunity for some of them, for others it may result in exploitation and abuse, and their vulnerability as migrants (cf. E/CN.6/2012/3, 10).

All these challenges impact on the ability to care for themselves, their children and their family.

Rural women are often the caregivers in the family and the broader community. The negative consequences of neglected children, born and unborn, and the family—the natural and fundamental group unit of society (cf., Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16, 3)—are far reaching. Improving the lives of rural women will therefore assist their family, the community and society as a whole.

Madame Chair,

Poverty and hunger are brought about to a large degree by discrimination against women that persists in many areas where women are deprived of legal rights and a voice in decisions that affect them.

Education and training, the provision of resources, service delivery, financial systems and communication technology are just some areas which need pressing attention, and which lead to realization of the right to development (cf. Declaration of the High Level Panel of Experts, Article 8, 1).

The cooperation and involvement of men, especially in the form of joint initiatives by men and women to overcome prejudice and implement policies, is crucial to an effective human-centered approach, one which respects fully the inherent dignity of the human person, an essential component to prevailing over the challenges faced by rural women and all women.

Madame Chair,

My delegation is strongly committed to the role of women in society. Women and in particular rural women should be given the recognition that is due to them and they should be able to make an impact on the world around them.

The President of the UN provides an opportunity for experiences to be shared and best practices to be developed. Particular emphasis is accorded to the dignity of women, which is enshrined in the very nature of being human, and which flows both rights and responsibilities.

Both the United Nations and other stakeholders are called to contribute positively towards policy development to enable women who are suffering to be freed from oppressive circumstances.

The Sustainable Development Summit (SDS) 2019, to be held in New York, offers another opportunity to strengthen the attention on rural persons, men, women and girls, and to increase their engagement in policymaking processes for building sustainable societies. Indeed, in the words of the Secretary General: "Rural women are powerful agents and participants in sustainable development who can implement sustainable solutions to address our priorities of climate change and environmental degradation" (cf., E/CN.6/2012/3, 21, 62).

Madame Chair,

The Secretary General rightly indicated in his report that the advancement of rural women and girls is a key element of the solution to today's most serious global challenges (cf., E/CN.6/2012/3, 22). It is my delegation's firm belief that attention to food security and rural women is a key element for integral development.

Our delegation remains committed to protecting the weakest and the poorest members of society and contributing to the common good of all.

Thank you, Madame Chair.