



DAY OF RURAL WOMEN 2016

Addressing Violence Against Women in Rural Areas A public statement from the Associated Country Women of the World

The Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) believe that full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is crucial to the safety, well-being and success of women around the world. ACWW's members and societies have passed resolutions against the practise of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), the trafficking of women and children, and violence against women and girls. Additional policies on gender perspective and the rights of women and girl refugees and those most at risk from conflict have been agreed at Conferences. It is clear that women in rural areas are extremely vulnerable to gender-based violence, particularly because of their isolation and the lack of monitoring / enforcement of relevant legislation, combined with a lack of appropriate support services.

Whilst CEDAW has been acknowledged and ratified by the vast majority of countries in the world, it is notable that the United States of America, Iran, Palau, Somalia, Sudan and Tonga remain outside this framework. ACWW calls on these nations to fully ratify CEDAW, and for other members of the international community to exert pressure and influence on these states to promote the Convention's adoption. It is also noted that the Holy See has not ratified the Convention, and we call on Pope Francis to show leadership on this issue.

Within countries that have ratified CEDAW, there remains some reluctance to fully integrate international and regional legislation into domestic law – in many countries, the discussion of domestic or gender-based violence continues to be a taboo subject. Across the world, recent governmental policies of 'austerity' have led to the closure of many women's refuges. Whilst FGM has been illegal in the UK since 1985, there have been no successful convictions against those who perpetrate, hide or promote the associated practices. We welcome New Zealand's recent strengthening of the Domestic Violence Act, including clauses on coercion to marry – but note that these changes come only in light of revelations that the country reports that one in every three New Zealand women experience sexual or physical abuse in their lifetime. Recent developments in child-protection and national policy in Malawi offer positive models of societal change and gender equality for rural women.

At the local, national and international level, rural women must be prioritised for funding of social services, health care and co-ordinated programmes highlighting the danger and impact of gender-based violence. Gender-sensitive training must be provided for police forces and judicial bodies, with legislation enforced at all levels – and relevant sentences imposed upon perpetrators. Governments must act to promote recruitment of women into essential services including healthcare and law enforcement, as well in the judiciary; crucial in safeguarding the reporting process for at-risk women and girls to ensure crimes are reported and that victims are protected from reprisal. Ineffectual judicial systems, poor understanding of the law and a lack of trust between victim and law enforcement are all serious problems for women, and in particular rural women. The process of re-victimising women must end.

Educating our populations in human rights, improving understanding of gender-related crimes and simplification of legal language will all help change the current situation. Underlying causes of domestic violence, such as stress and loss of dignity due to poor education, unemployment and poverty, also need to be addressed. Mothers must be free and able to empower their children – ensuring girls value themselves sufficiently to find gender-based violence unacceptable, whilst boys are raised with the same belief and fervently support the rights of women. There must also be an understanding that not all perpetrators are men, and other forms of relationship-based abuse and harm damage our societies.

ACWW believes that existing programmes such as the UN's 'Step it Up for Gender Equality'¹, 'UNiTE to End Violence Against Women'² and '#HeforShe'³ initiatives should be supported globally. Community engagement initiatives, including the use of role-play, films, cartoons and other informational materials, must be launched and supported in rural and more developed areas. Drastic action is needed, and we call on governments and international bodies to fully implement not just the letter of the law, but also its spirit. We particularly highlight Sustainable Development Goal 5.2⁴ and emphasise Article 14 of CEDAW⁵, which requires ratifying parties to ensure the Convention's implementation for the benefit of rural women.

Ruth Shanks AM
ACWW World President

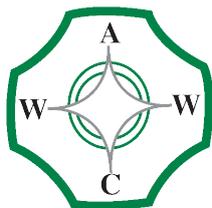
Kerry Maw
Chairman, ACWW United Nations Committee

References

- 1 UN Women *“Step it Up for Gender Equality”*
<http://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/step-it-up>
- 2 United Nations Secretary General’s Campaign to End Violence Against Women *“UNiTE”*
<http://endviolence.un.org/>
- 3 UN Women *“#HeforShe”*
<http://www.heforshe.org/en>
- 4 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals *“SDG 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.”*
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5>
- 4 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
“Article 14:
 1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.
 2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:
 - (a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;
 - (b) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;
 - (c) To benefit directly from social security programmes;
 - (d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;
 - (e) To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self employment;
 - (f) To participate in all community activities;
 - (g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;
 - (h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

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