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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by WIDE Network - Women in Development Europe, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs and of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

Urgent need of gender justice and an economy of care

For more than three decades official documents repeat the fact that women worldwide add up to the largest group affected by hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Social exclusion and discrimination have been found to be the root-causes in most countries. Nevertheless, few governments worldwide are eager and willing to effectively combat abuse and violations of women's basic human rights with adequate measures and means.

In October 2010, UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon promised to mobilise 40 billion US\$ for access to health care for women and children to close the biggest gap in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. What has happened to this initiative? The outrageous high maternity death rates are an indicator that women's basic health needs are far from being covered, with a continuing gap between urban and rural areas. So far, policies, strategies and interventions by governments and international institutions have not made a significant impact regarding better infrastructure for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, an upgrading of the fight against HIV/AIDS and other treatable diseases, measures to stop violence against women, better access to water and sanitation for the poor and a subsequent reduction of child mortality. The situation is particularly critical for women in fragile and (post) conflict countries whose lives are threatened by the most severe risks.

Lack of access to health care, education, economic resources and political participation has a

disastrous impact on the lives and livelihood of women worldwide, impinging on their role as productive agents. The burden women carry through their “care”-work in the household represents a gender specific limitation for women especially in rural areas where public social services are widely lacking.

The situation of rural women also has to be analysed by taking into account industrialised agriculture within the context of a globalised, aggressively liberalised economy in the last decades. This model is characterized by horizontal and vertical integration of commercial agricultural production, food processing and -distribution as well as trade, with oligopolies and even monopolies in selected segments, creating a surplus of industrial food being wasted or dumped in global markets, destroying local production. The industrial model of food production is responsible for drastic losses of biodiversity and soil fertility, contributes to climate change, causes forced migration and is directly related to rural hunger and malnutrition. Furthermore, the massively increased financial speculation on commodities has led to the severe food-crisis in 2007/2008 and has made consumers in general, but low-income, women-lead households in particular, extremely vulnerable to rising prices.

As a result of the multiple crisis (energy, food, finances and social reproduction) framework-conditions for women in rural areas, especially in African but also in Asian and Latin American countries, seem to have become even worse: The privatization and the rush for land, water and other natural resources by transnational companies effects women very strongly, as it is especially rural poor women who depend most directly on the access to common public goods

such as forests, so called “waste land” or rivers. The non-recognition of human rights by agribusiness and the extractive industries has exacerbated women’s vulnerability, their exposure to sexual and economic violence. Basic human rights like the right to food, water and adequate livelihoods are ignored, people swept away from their traditional land and women put into even more marginalized situations – as migrants, farm workers, workers in the informal economy or as household employees.

Green Economy as an Answer?

After the failure of the climate change summit in Copenhagen 2009, UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has promoted a “Global Green Deal” to overcome the financial, energy and climate crisis. WIDE supports the efforts to reach a real “Global Green Deal” but criticizes that in the current proposals the driving force remains economic growth and not the redistribution of wealth and income; gender justice is hardly mentioned. WIDE demands that any model of “green development” puts forward the human rights framework from the outset and is coherent with the development paradigm that women are struggling for globally: social and gender justice along with ecological sustainability of economic activities. Therefore, WIDE considers the vision formulated by the Women’s Action Agenda 21 almost 20 years ago in the context of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, still valid in many core aspects: Starting from a critique on the concept of the free market and economic growth, it advocates for a new ethics of economy and its relation to nature, for the respect and protection of biological and cultural diversity, for demilitarisation, justice between

North and South and the empowerment of women through the promotion of democratic, reproductive and resources-oriented rights. In the current situation of multiple crisis, where many previously formulated goals and international protocols regarding environmental protection as well as women's human rights have not been achieved, it becomes urgent to rethink strategic options and starting points of transforming the current economic model.

For the empowerment of rural women we need to move forward in the construction of long-term development paradigms based upon women's and people's rights – including indigenous peoples' rights – rather than on profit maximisation and a supposed economic efficiency which is not providing human well being for the large majority and especially not for women. It is necessary to promote a model of „green economy“ based on redistribution (between states, societies and generations) rather than on infinite growth. Thereby the social sector – including the “care”-economy – as well as the manifold small scale agriculture and local food production systems have to be recognized as keys for alternative economic models.

WIDE has found compelling evidence that grassroots women in alliance with feminist scientists, academics and politicians can and must play a key role in a constructive process of transformation.

To promote women's empowerment and agency especially in rural areas, WIDE urges Governments and United Nations Bodies to:

- to improve and implement laws that secure equal access to land and means of production for women and men,
- to ensure that the existing formal and informal marriage-inheritance systems do not discriminate against women/girls,
- to investigate and take adequate legal and juridical steps against structural violence against women at intra family level and at all sites of economic activities,
- to promote women's sexual and reproductive health and rights especially in rural areas,
- to provide affordable and high quality public infrastructure (water, electricity, sanitation, social services, education),
- to ensure that women participate in the designing of development strategies at all levels,
- to strengthen women's participation in conflict resolution in fragile or post conflict countries,
- to promote ecologically sustainable ways of local food production, distribution and consumption, including women's accumulated knowledge and experiences,
- to improve women's access to sustainable technologies, credit and market access,
- to strengthen the human and labour rights of migrant women, women working on farms and in (agro-)export processing zones,
- to put a moratorium on large-scale agricultural investments ("land grabbing"),
- to stop financial speculation on food and natural resources,
- to take into account and strengthen women's agency in programmes to combat hunger instead of creating new dependencies (e.g. putting clear limits in the use of prefabricated breast mil and/or high energy food to defined emergency situations),

- to implement the principle of food sovereignty in agricultural and trade policies,
- to recognize women's labour in the subsistence / small holder economy as well as their reproductive work in measuring national economics,
- to implement the Beijing Platform for Action which specifies actions for governments and transnational companies to comply with national and international legislation and conventions, especially those related to women's new and traditional economic activities and environmental issues,
- to agree to a fair distribution of wealth and to promote internationally coordinated tax systems (financial transaction tax, environmental taxes, stop of corporate tax evasion and closure of tax heavens), in order to finance sustainable, human rights based development.

WIDE calls on governments of developed countries to fulfil their obligation to respect the integral human rights of women worldwide, especially where bi- and multilateral relations mutually shape policies and programmes via aid-, trade-, investment-, and/or other agreements.

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