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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 the Rural Development Leadership Network, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs IV.30 and IV.31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

Of the approximately 3.4 billion women in the world, more than 500 million are poor rural women. Of these poor rural women, about 4.2 million live in the United States.

Some of these U.S. poor rural women are working on small farms or as farmworkers for corporate farmers. Increasingly, however, their income comes from non-farm sources, but employers are closing plants and have been laying people off, increasingly during the great recession . A disproportionate number of families in persistently poor rural areas in the U.S. are people of colour or otherwise historically oppressed. New economic options are comparatively limited because the Internet is only spottily available. Access to healthcare is often inadequate because of distance to providers. Public transportation is rarely available. Rural women are especially vulnerable to domestic violence because of their economic and social status and comparative isolation. Educational attainment among rural women is lower than among the general population. As in developing countries, self-employment and micro-enterprise appear to provide a path to greater self-sufficiency.

The Platform for Action recognizes the extent of poverty in the developing world and in pockets of poverty in developed countries, succinctly summarizing some of its causes:

Women's poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources, including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process. Poverty can also force women into situations in which they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

The Platform notes the disproportionate burdens rural women bear. Because of their distance

from centres of power, media, money, and influence, the concerns of rural women are often not included on the agendas of decision-making bodies. The theme of CSW56 is a positive step in recognizing the concerns of poor rural women worldwide.

In order to fulfil the potential of this theme and to meet the CSW recommendation that women be represented in the decision-making bodies that affect them, it is important that more poor rural women be present at CSW56 and at future CSW sessions, including women from pockets of poverty in developed countries. The professional and academic women who predominate at CSW meetings perform important work as allies of the poor. But the empowerment of poor rural women will be realized more fully when they have a seat at the table. Their role in poverty and hunger eradication will be enhanced. Their recommendations for development and current challenges will be heard. They are leaders in their communities and deserve the same chance as others to meet with peers from around the world, share experiences and strategies, and advocate for themselves and the causes they believe in. We recommend that member states make this possible by giving financial support for the participation in CSW sessions by poor rural women from their countries and that voluntary groups and NGO's working with the United Nations do the same.