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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; priority theme: “The empowerment of rural women
and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development
and current challenges”**

Statement submitted by Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 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 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.



Statement

On the occasion of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom takes this opportunity to express our continued support for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the conclusions agreed upon at the fifty-fifth session. For nearly a century, the League has concentrated on the links between gender inequality, socio-economic injustice and the root causes of war. Following the fifty-fifth session, women from around the world convened for the League's International Congress in San José (30 July-6 August 2011) to reaffirm our position and refocus on work to prevent conflict and insecurity through the advancement of the rights of all.

In the light of the priority theme for the fifty-sixth session, "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges", the League draws attention to cross-cutting issues: participation, land rights and access, indigenous rights, natural resources, food security, and the particular challenges and impacts of disasters, conflict and insecurity on the lives of rural women.

Rural women are often subject to particular rights violations, exclusion, isolation and poverty, and are acutely affected by natural and man-made disasters, including economic crises, climate change, militarization and conflict. To draw attention to some common themes, the League will highlight cases from our national Sections that exemplify the complexity and range of challenges facing rural women.

The League continuously emphasizes the participation of women at all stages and levels of decision-making as essential for the achievement of better standards of living, the eradication of poverty, the promotion of democracy, the pursuit of sustainable development and just peace. Despite this, women, particularly rural women, continue to be excluded from local government and are rarely represented at the national or international level. Furthermore, the misrepresentation of women's political concerns exacerbates the particular economic and social challenges that they face.

The Pakistan Section of the League emphasizes that the empowerment of rural women is essential to facilitating real participation. We recall the recommendations made at the annual conference of the Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy held in Islamabad on World Rural Women's Day, with more than 800 participants, mostly rural women from all over Pakistan. The recommendations called for the representation of rural women at all levels of decision-making, including within village union councils and district peace committees; a new line item to be added to all district annual budgets; and an implementation mechanism for the Anti-Sexual Harassment Law. Here, the League stresses that women should not be seen only as victims, but rather as agents for change in their communities.

Rural women have long suffered the negative impacts of globalization, liberalization and privatization. Women are discriminated against and excluded by policy regarding the ownership and use of natural resources, including land, water, food and mining goods. The India Section advocates that, before the State acquires land from farmers, women be consulted and the exchange not be considered legal until the consent of women is granted. Currently, Indian farmers, especially female farmers, are coerced into giving up their land, then forced to move to urban areas

where they join the unskilled workforce, which often culminates in a significant decline in their standard of living due to lack of access to education, health care and decent wages.

For farmers who remain in rural communities, the environment becomes polluted and farming becomes a greater challenge. The stripping of natural resources causes severe degradation of the environment, in turn making agricultural land more susceptible to flash flooding, erosion and even drought. These effects on rural communities, especially women, who bear much of the burden of work in rural areas, are devastating, taking an unimaginable economic, social and cultural toll on rural communities. Similarly, environmental degradation and its incapacitating effects on sustainability and community health are caused and exacerbated by conflict, the military-industrial complex, and arms production and consumption, as well as by the dangerous use and lasting effects of depleted uranium, the remnants of war and unsustainable mining.

The Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Sections, like the India Section, underline the importance of protecting our natural resources and food security. Agriculture remains the main source of employment and basis for survival of rural women. In fact, the majority of farmers worldwide are women, yet these women fail to receive equal access to technologies, training, credit, land and support. Empowering rural women with regard to food security may substantially affect the available food supply in coming decades.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, natural resources and food supply are severely negatively affected by ongoing insecurity and conflict, which has resulted in the forced displacement of communities to camps where they become dependent on insufficient food aid. In addition, where natural resources, including water and land, become less readily available owing to natural or non-natural causes, the potential for recurring and protracted violence increases. Furthermore, rural women are at a heightened risk of experiencing attacks, including sexual violence, when they must leave displacement camps or communities to farm their lands. The League emphasizes the importance of ensuring the protection of rural women, their access to natural resources and their ability to farm safely. The Sections of the League demand that women and men have fair and equal access to all natural, economic and political resources, that women are included in programmes and processes, and that they are consulted on how to protect and conserve those resources.

The Costa Rica, Colombia and Mexico Sections specifically highlight the historical and ongoing exclusion of indigenous women, which has seen them forced to inhabit remote regions, with extremely limited access to resources and services. These communities continue to suffer extreme economic and social marginalization and lack of access to basic human rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We call on all Government, civil society and private sector actors to reverse the marginalization of rural indigenous peoples, particularly rural women, and to ensure that these communities are granted equal access to basic rights and services as members of society.

These examples have showcased the broad range of challenges facing rural women, challenges exacerbated by violence and conflict as experienced by members of the League around the world, including in Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of

the Congo and Colombia. In conflict-affected rural communities, while men engage in war, women sustain families, manage the economy, provide food, and take care of all matters private and public. Right now, our sisters in many places, such as Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic, are suffering and struggling to keep their families alive amid brutal violence. The League strongly condemns all forms of violence and calls for an immediate end to the oppressive use of force wherever and whenever it takes place. In addition, we call on Governments and relevant actors to ensure that all women receive adequate protection from and reparation for acts of violence.

In all societies, the proliferation of weapons continues to facilitate the commission of grave crimes and human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. In addition to the impact of weapons, there are direct and indirect links between excessive military expenditure, the arms trade, violent conflict, and a reduction in resources available for social, economic and rural development and gender equality. The League demands the implementation of Critical Area E of the Beijing Platform for Action, which calls for the control of excessive arms expenditure, and the Charter of the United Nations, which, in its Article 26, calls for “the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources”.

We urge States and United Nations officials not only to support us with words, but also to invest in the prevention of violence, discrimination and conflict, and to challenge militarism and its negative impacts on women and communities, especially in rural areas. We call on all stakeholders to work towards effective and robust disarmament, and regulation of the arms trade, as well as appropriate control of the circulation of existing arms. In this regard, we advocate that the international arms trade treaty currently under negotiation be used not merely as a procedural authorization of arms transfers, but as a mechanism to aid in the prevention of armed conflict and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and to significantly reduce the culture and economy of militarism.

In addition to the Beijing Platform for Action, the League demands the full implementation of obligations to protect women’s human rights and promote the participation of women and gender equality, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in particular its article 14, on rural women, and the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security.

The League reaffirms its commitment to the realization of sustainable peace based on human dignity. We look forward to working with partners around the world to dismantle the prevailing culture of militarism and to create a culture of peace in which, racism, discrimination, economic injustice, violence and all forms of oppression are absent and in which women, including rural women, are full and equal participants.
