



# Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

NGO in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

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This statement is on behalf of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

(APWLD), representing rural women, including indigenous women from over 25 countries in the region. As part of the APWLD delegation of nine rural women, first time attending the CSW, I'd like to voice out our concerns and recommendations to the CSW.

This world is an unjust place for the majority of rural and indigenous women living in the global south. With the least economic resources of all populations we face systemic violations of our rights in a world where economic power increasingly equates to political and personal power. We urge the Commission to recognise that the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms is an essential principle for development and poverty eradication, not the other way around. Material wealth and economic growth does not automatically result in the enjoyment of human rights and can in fact exacerbate the divide between us and the wealthy.

While there have been repeated international commitments to realise rural women's rights, our experiences demonstrate that there still are many obstacles restricting the full enjoyment of our rights. We identified *right to a dignified livelihood and access to resources, violence against women, women's access to education, health care, and discriminatory laws and practices* as key priority issues.

*Access, ownership and inheritance of land* is important for rural women's economic empowerment. However, many of our lands are being sold to private investors, large corporations and developers. These practices are encouraged in the name of economic development and growth but women's access to land is commonly undermined by the privatization and promotion of large scale agrobusiness over small scale farming. Furthermore, they reinforce the divide between those who are enriched by corporate profits and those of us whose loss of livelihoods enable that profit. We call on governments to support small scale and subsistence farming and stop promoting large scale, foreign agro-investment that reduces access to land by local, rural women.

***Violence against women*** is a major obstacle to rural women's rights and empowerment. Our communities are less likely to have state services to provide support to survivors of violence, less likely to have access to justice through courts and police and less likely to be able to leave violent relationships or pay legal expenses with little financial resources. We urge governments to pay special attention to the needs of rural women in the process of preparing the CSW 2013 where the Commission will look into the issue of elimination and prevention of all forms of VAW.

***Education and training for women*** is key to empowering women in rural and remote areas. Yet, communities and villages away from the big cities do not always have facilities or resources for schools. Experience tells us that cut backs in public education expenditure and the privatisation of education translates into the withdrawal of more girls from schools. Subsequently, lack of education and training limit women's access to decent employment opportunities and participation in political and public life.

***The right of women to control all aspects of their health*** is fundamental to our life and integrity. Rural women face significant barriers to health care, especially when it comes to sexual and reproductive health. Fertility rates and maternal mortality in rural areas are generally higher than those in urban areas as we have less access to sexual education, family planning and health care services. Neoliberal economic policies have resulted in reduced government spending, privatisation of health and increased user fees for essential public services. Since our health is not sufficiently profitable so we become the last priority for healthcare. We call upon government to allocate the Allocate the financial, technical and human resources necessary for rural women's access to education and training, information, healthcare and nutrition services and infrastructure.

***The under-representation of women from rural areas in political and public life*** remain high in most societies. Discriminatory attitudes and practices limit the space for women's political participation within their communities. We call upon the States to ensure equal representation and meaningful participation of rural and indigenous women in the decision-making processes at all levels.