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### Commission on the Status of Women

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by Réseau International des Droits Humains (RIDH), 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **Persistent challenges regarding the equality and empowerment of rural women and girls**

The concept note of the meeting of the expert group established in preparation for the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme, addressed three critical and interconnected areas of considerable importance for the realization of the rights of rural women. In this statement, Réseau International des Droits Humains and Asociación Colectivo Mujeres al Derecho speak from the standpoint of Colombia and the situation of Colombian women in rural areas about each of these issues and provide the Commission with recommendations to guide States parties.

#### **Rights to a decent standard of living, a secure income and social security**

The Colombian National Administrative Department of Statistics has found that women make up 52 per cent of the national population and that 46 per cent live in rural areas. National household surveys have highlighted gaps in rural areas in terms of access to rights such as housing, public services, health, education and income generation. Meanwhile, the most recent human development report of the United Nations Development Programme in Colombia shows that in terms of quality of housing, access and availability of basic public services, level of education and the potential for decent and steady income generation, there are still serious disparities between highly rural municipalities and cities. As a result, poverty levels are 2.3 times higher in rural areas than in urban centres.

Furthermore, according to the figures of the Colombian National Employment Service, there are still differences in Colombia between the rate of participation in the labour market and the rate of employment of men and women, with the gap in rural areas increasing by 34 and 36 per cent respectively.

According to data from the Colombian Ministry of Health (Bulletin 002 of 2015, published with the support of FAO), the situation has been getting worse in rural areas because in the distribution of activities common to the care economy and family farming, the division of work between the sexes is still unequal within families and rural communities; women are responsible for activities related to caring for and assisting family members; and women over 10 years of age are responsible for food security and diet.

#### **Rights to food and to ensuring food security and nutrition**

The Colombian constitutional court recognizes the particular vulnerability of Colombian rural women in the wake of changes in food production and in the use and exploitation of natural resources, and acknowledges the impact this is having on their ability to gain their livelihood.

Communities involving traditional subsistence economies are contending, on the one hand, with the strong growth of the food production industry and its increased use of technology, and, on the other hand, the exploration and exploitation of natural resources for the implementation of macroprojects. These situations have harmed

traditional agricultural and/or aquacultural practices, and have therefore had an impact on economies based on traditional forms of subsistence.

A clear example illustrating this is the deaths of rural indigenous children from the ethnic Wayuu community in the La Guajira region, where the environmental and human rights situation is complex because of the operation in the region of the world's largest open-pit coal mine, which has led to dispossession and a sizeable share of the territory being used for mining activity. As a result, poverty rates are high and the availability of food has been seriously affected, owing to the impact on agriculture. Approximately 25.5 per cent of deaths of minors from malnutrition in Colombia occur in this region.

The case of the rural communities in the Atlántico and Magdalena regions, which acquired land in accordance with Act No. 160 of 1994, illustrates the systematic impact on rural women's right to food. On the basis of a study of people in 12 of these communities, mostly women, it has been concluded that they face chronic food insecurity owing to an inadequate supply of food, a lack of economic stability to access the scarce food that is available and a lack of access to other resources needed to produce food.

### **Access to land**

The concentration of land in Colombia continues to have a serious impact on women in rural areas. Some 4.2 per cent of this land (small plots of land of less than five hectares) is in the hands of 67.6 per cent of landowners, whereas 46.5 per cent of the land (properties of over 500 hectares) is owned by 0.4 per cent of landowners. In this context, it is unclear what percentage of land is owned by rural women.

The last National Agricultural Census found that there are 264,000 women producers. This means that the participation rate of women in production is 26 per cent, compared to 61.5 per cent for men and 12.5 per cent for joint production by men and women. However, this information is incomplete because it does not reflect other gender relations in the agricultural sector, other types of production carried out by women, reproductive work and care work.

In the context of the implementation of the peace agreements in Colombia, two important instruments, which should help to change the situation of rural women, are currently being negotiated with a view to carrying out comprehensive rural reform: the multipurpose land registry, which aims to update the sources and registries of the land holdings which will form the bulk of the 3 million hectares of land to be handed over to the rural population, and the decree on land construction development programmes, which contains very important activities to strengthen rural communities. A cause for concern in the case of both initiatives is the fact that women farmers and their organizations have not been properly consulted and that all activities to implement the regulations in prioritized territories are being pushed forward through public institutions without the participation of civil society. It is important that these processes are open to rural women, who can impart their own perspectives and knowledge of the territories.

In the light of the above, we recommend that the Commission should urge States parties to:

- Create gender indicators in statistical systems and adopt a gender-based approach in the production of non-quantitative information in the agricultural and rural sector, in order to provide information about gender relations and the cultural and social issues faced by women, with the aim of obtaining baselines

for planning and implementing public policies which genuinely change the situation of women.

- Tackle the structural inequalities that rural women face in their access to natural resources essential for production (mainly, land and water) by advancing agricultural reform processes that protect women's rights to land.
  - Create mechanisms to protect the economy of rural women and the traditional forms of subsistence of rural communities.
  - Ensure observance of the rights of rural women and girls to food and nutrition, taking into account the changes that are taking place in rural areas and food systems.
  - Establish mechanisms for promoting the development prospects of rural women and incorporating these into the design, planning and implementation of rural development and land management policies, in order to guarantee women's access to land and other natural resources and their enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights.
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