

# Encourage, empower and support women in rural areas

Speech by Willemien Koning-Hoeve, UN Women's Representative on behalf of The Kingdom of The Netherlands 2018, held on October 5<sup>th</sup> 2018 in New York

Thank you Chair,

Ladies and gentlemen,

## Let's encourage, empower and support women in rural areas

Today, as we're talking about the advancement of women, I'd like to draw your attention to an important topic and one of the CSW's priority themes: gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in rural areas. Improving the position of these women can also help us achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Thus far, we've made progress, but we need to move faster.

As the UN women's representative on behalf of The Kingdom of The Netherlands and a farmer myself, I'm a committed advocate for rural women. I know plenty of female role models in farming and fisheries. But their strong position does not extend to all women living in rural areas or working in food production. It's 2018, and we cannot accept that countless rural women, who play a key role in feeding the world and shaping the landscape, face inequality and the risk of poverty.

Last year I spoke to many women and promised to give them a voice in the United Nations. Anneke in the Netherlands, a chicken farmer, and Lucy in the United States, a dairy farmer, both told me that they work hard on their modern and sustainable farms, but that people aren't prepared to pay a fair price for their products. Their life has become a fight against bankruptcy.

Maria in Ethiopia brought me to tears. Every day she walks six hours to fetch water for her family and her crops. Imagine the opportunities she'd have if she could invest that time and energy in her farm.

Sizani Nugabe in South Africa told me how she's been fighting for women's land rights for almost 20 years. But legislation and cultural and religious traditions are still blocking this goal. When husbands die, wives are left behind with no land and no source of income.

Cultures and religion are important in the lives of people. But they should not stand in the way of women's development. Instead, they can go hand in hand so lives of women, families and whole communities can be improved.

Did you know that women own less than 20 percent of land? Many women are farming their husband's land.

Even in developed European countries like The Netherlands, equal pay for equal work is not a given. As a result the gender pension gap is as high as 47 percent on average in Europe – posing problems for divorced women in particular.

Studies have also reported inequality in decision-making. Despite women having the skills and experience to merit a place at the top table.

**In the light of the above, I want to urge UN Member States to follow up on the General Assembly resolution on the *Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas*, adopted by consensus last December and the *Agreed Conclusions of the 62<sup>nd</sup> CSW* this March.**

**Especially, I would like to draw your attention to five focus areas.**

1. Enhance political and socioeconomic empowerment of rural women and supporting their full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels.
2. Support for women's and farmers' organizations and cooperatives. I'm a firm believer in the power of cooperatives. They offer women opportunities for economic participation and improving their business skills. As well as better access to markets and to high-quality and affordable seeds, breeds and other supplies.
3. Designing, revising and implementing laws to ensure that rural women are accorded full and equal rights to own land and other property, and raise awareness on equality of ownership.
4. Ensure that all farmers – men as well as women – can get a fair price for their products. Only then can family farms survive, work sustainably, help combat for example climate change and maintain links with the wider community. By closing the gap between those living in a city and those in rural areas, we can also contribute poverty alleviation, hunger eradication, food security and nutrition.
5. Create living conditions in rural areas to match those in urban areas. Women need facilities such as watermanagement, access to lifelong education, healthcare, childcare, new forms of technology and digital access to move forward.

I urge you all to address these issues. Across the world, women and men, and children, we all will benefit if we encourage, empower and support women in rural areas.

Thank you.

*Willemien Koning-Hoeve*

*Women's Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to UN 2018*