



Statement to be delivered by H.E. Martina Vuk, State Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Family Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity, on behalf of the Group of Friends of Older Persons

Sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women (62CSW)

“Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”

United Nations Headquarters in New York
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Excellencies, distinguished guests, dear colleagues,

I have the pleasure to speak on behalf of the following members of the “Group of Friends of Older Persons” at the United Nations in New York. The Group is comprised by Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Qatar, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uruguay and my own country, Slovenia

Let me begin by congratulating you Madame Chair, as well as the other members of the Bureau, for your election to lead our works during the current session. You can count with our full support in order to have a very successful and productive session.

Excellencies,

The empowerment of rural women and girls of all ages and the realization of their human rights and gender equality are essential to the achievement of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

The increase in the number of older persons globally and the growing trend of ageing societies all over the world represents a significant change to the demographic structures of our societies and imposes a series of new changes to development and human rights, including for older women in rural areas.

It is undeniable that older persons can make a significant contribution to the social, economic and sustainable development of their societies, if an enabling environment and adequate guarantees are in place. In that sense, it is imperative to fully empower older persons to allow them to effectively make that contribution, becoming not only recipients of special care and social protection, but also specific rights holders and active agents and beneficiaries of change.

The Group of Friends expresses its concern about the fact that, in many countries, the ageing population is marked in rural areas, due to the migration and displacement of young adults towards urban areas and foreign countries. Older persons may be left behind without an adequate support from their families, and even without adequate financial resources. Policies and programmes for food and nutritional security and food agricultural production, as well as social protection must take into account the implications of rural ageing. Older women in rural areas are particularly vulnerable economically, especially when their role is restricted to unpaid care and domestic work and they are dependent on others for their support and survival.

Also, we are particularly concerned about the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that may affect older women in rural areas and their full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly those in vulnerable groups or situations.

In that regard, designing and implementing policies and programmes, as well as devising adequate national, regional and international legal frameworks that effectively and specifically promote the full enjoyment of the human rights of older persons, including for older women in rural areas, and allow their full social inclusion, as well as their participation in social, economic, cultural, civil and political life, without any restraints and free from all forms of discrimination and violence, will lead to ensure their dignity, empowerment, and their ability to fully and effectively enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms, actively participating in their societies and contributing to its development.

Madame Chair,

Despite restrictions on legal international migration, migration flows have increased internationally. In some countries, economic support, including remittances, is often a vital lifeline to older persons and through them to their communities and local economies. As international migrants from earlier decades grow older, some Governments are seeking to assist older migrants.

Also, gender inequalities and disparities in economic power sharing, unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men, lack of technological and financial support for women's entrepreneurship, unequal access to, and control over, capital, in particular land and credit and access to labour markets, as well as all harmful traditional and customary practices, have constrained rural women's economic empowerment and exacerbated the feminization of poverty. In many societies, female-headed households, including divorced, separated and unmarried women and widows, are at particular risk of poverty. That's why special social protection measures are required to address the feminization of poverty, in particular for older women from rural areas.

The Group of Friends recalls that the Madrid International Plan of Action of Ageing calls for the elimination of social and economic inequalities based on age, gender or any other ground, including linguistic barriers, to ensure that older persons have universal and equal access to health care. To this end it envisages *inter alia* the taking of measures to ensure equal distribution of health and rehabilitation resources to older persons and, in particular, increase access for these resources for older persons who are poor and vulnerable and promote their distribution to poorly served areas, such as rural areas, including affordable access to essential medications and other therapeutic measures.

The Group of Friends highlights the importance of taking measures to strengthen the capacity of older farmers, including rural women farmers through continued access to appropriate financial and infrastructure services and training for improved farming techniques and technologies; to foster the development of local financial services, including microcredit schemes and microfinance institutions in underserved rural areas in order to encourage investment; to promote ongoing adult education, training and retraining in rural areas; to ensure that the rights of older women in rural areas are taken into account with regard to their equal access to and control of economic resources; to ensure equal access to basic social services for older persons in rural areas; to design and implement programmes and provide services to sustain the independence of older persons in rural areas, including older persons with disabilities and give priority to the empowerment of older women in rural areas through access to financial and infrastructure services, in line with the priority theme of this Session of the CSW.

To conclude, Madame Chair,

Gender equality and the empowerment and human rights of rural women and girls of all ages are essential for the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The fulfillment of the rights of all rural women and girls *inter alia* to an adequate standard of living, to a life free of violence and harmful practices and to land and productive assets, food security and nutrition, decent work, education and health, is fundamental. Renewed commitments, improved policies and their rigorous implementation, and greater financing from all sources, including increased official development assistance, are required in order to leave no rural woman or girl behind.

In this regard, the Group of Friends stands ready to engage in substantive discussions with the rest of the Membership in order to discuss and work together to take measures to face the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls of all ages.

Thank you,