

# 15 October 2007 - World Rural Women's Day®

ANNUAL WWSF GLOBAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TO INCREASE KNOWLEDGE AND EMPOWERMENT  
**MEMBER OF THE MILLENNIUM CAMPAIGN - VOICES AGAINST POVERTY -  
TO HELP IMPLEMENT THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS MDGs**  
IN SYNERGY WITH WORLD FOOD DAY - 16 OCTOBER & INTL. DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY - 17 OCTOBER



## Open Letter to Rural Women of the World

Theme: **CLAIM YOUR RIGHT TO FOOD !**

**Dear Sisters** living in rural communities around the world,

Today, we wish to inform you of your right to food. Did you know that it is a human right? It is *universal*, acknowledged at the national, regional and international level, and applies to every person and group of persons. This right is not a political option that governments can choose to implement or ignore. Acknowledging this right means obligations for governments. The primacy of human rights over an economic or commercial agreement has been affirmed repeatedly by UN resolutions adopted by member states.

**The right to food was first recognized at the international level in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.** Art. 25 proclaims: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html> The importance of the Universal Declaration lies in its acceptance today by all countries. Complementary rights enabling you to improve access to food, health, education, training and opportunities for employment have been outlined in the *1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* which is the most important UN Convention dedicated to women's rights. 185 countries - over 90% of UN member states - are party to this Convention. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

The right to food is also defined in the General Comment No. 12 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: "The right of every man, woman and child alone and in community with others to have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement in ways consistent with human dignity". (§6)

Accordingly, **the right to food implies three types of obligations** - the obligation to **respect, protect and fulfil**. "The obligation to **respect** existing access to adequate food requires State parties not to take any measures that result in preventing such access. The obligation to **protect** requires measures by the State to ensure that enterprises or individuals do not deprive people of their access to adequate food. The obligation to **fulfil** (facilitate) means that States must pro-actively engage in activities intended to strengthen people's access to and utilization of resources and means to ensure their livelihood, including food security. Finally, whenever an individual or group is unable to enjoy the right to adequate food by the means at their disposal, States have the obligation to fulfil (provide) that right directly". (§15)

Many of you are farmers in your own right, mainly growing food on family plots for your families. Most of your work is invisible although you carry out essential work such as hoeing, planting, weeding and harvesting with simple tools and little outside assistance. This often means that you have no recognized independent status as farmers and your work is considered as secondary within both the family and society. The numbers, however, tell us a different story. In Sub-Saharan Africa, you contribute roughly 60 to 80% of labour in food production, both for household consumption and for sale. In Asia, you account for approximately 50% of overall regional food producers. In South and Southeast Asia, you play a major role in rice production, generally providing the unpaid family or wage labour needed for sowing, transplanting, harvesting and processing. Throughout the Pacific, you play prominent roles in food marketing and in fisheries. In Latin America you contribute 40% of the agricultural supply to the internal market and women's gardens and agricultural plots often constitute the only means of diversifying the diet.

**In other words, you make a vital contribution to feeding the world and for that you deserve recognition, acknowledgement and support. You are a key actor in reducing hunger and poverty.**

**On this year's World Day - 15 October - we empower you to claim your basic human right and ensure that your Government**

- **Invests** in eradicating hunger. The right to food is not about charity, but about ensuring that all people have the capacity to feed themselves
- **Protects** you from actions of others that might violate your right to food with the result of increasing levels of hunger and food insecurity
- **Provides** you with agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform
- **Makes** available to you training, education and extension services in order to increase your technical efficiency
- **Includes** you in development planning at all levels
- **Facilitates** the organization of your self-help groups, cooperatives and rural women's associations
- **Provides** you access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and family planning services (source: UN reports)
- **Implements** the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* and ratifies the *Optional Protocol* (if it has not already done so) as well as implements the strategic objectives and actions set out in the *Beijing Platform for Action*.

**Dear Sisters**, Please remember that no country or government is allowed to deny you your fundamental universal human rights. Lobby your government to proclaim **15 October a National Rural Women's Day**, a day for you to celebrate and show your contributions and to remind your Head of State to honour the promises made in your name. Remember you are the salt of the earth and give birth to humanity. WWSF invites you also to nominate candidates for its annual awards, **the Prize for women's creativity in rural life** (331 prizes awarded so far). For Nomination guidelines, visit (<http://www.woman.ch/women/1-guidelines.php>) and for names of Laureates, visit (<http://www.woman.ch/women/1-laureates.php>)

**Elly Pradervand**, WWSF Executive Director & Global campaign coordinator for World Rural Women's Day - 15 October [www.woman.ch](http://www.woman.ch)  
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**We thank you for sending us reports of your local and national activities to mark World Rural Women's Day 2007.**



## WHY A WORLD RURAL WOMEN'S DAY - 15 OCTOBER©

The day provides rural women and their organizations with a focal point to:

- Raise the profile of rural women
- Sensitize both government and civil society to their crucial yet largely unrecognized roles
- To promote action in their support. Initiatives on how to celebrate the World Day are left to individual organizations and communities, according to their own traditions and requirements. Activities or events should be concrete and visible. This action undertaken by rural and farming women in all parts of the world on the very same day, in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation, would strengthen the impact of the day.

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## FACTS ON RURAL WOMEN

- Rural women, mainly farmers, are at least 1.6 billion and represent more than a quarter of the total population
- Rural women produce on average more than half of all the food that is grown: up to 80% in Africa, 60% in Asia, between 30 and 40% in Latin America and Western countries.
- Women own only 2% of the land, and receive only 1% of all agricultural credit.
- Only 5% of all agricultural extension resources are directed to women.
- Women represent two thirds of all illiterate people.
- The number of rural women living in poverty has doubled since 1970.

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## MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS MDGs

**Eradicate extreme poverty & hunger; Achieve universal primary education; Promote gender equality and empower women; Reduce child mortality; Improve maternal health; Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria & other diseases; Ensure environmental sustainability; Develop a global partnership for development.**

**2007 reports indicate that the poorest are getting a little less poor in most regions except for sub-Saharan Africa which remains the highest in the world, indicating that the poor in that region are the most economically disadvantaged in the world.**

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## CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

### Article 14

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:
  - (a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning
  - (b) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning
  - (c) To benefit directly from social security programs
  - (d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, *inter alia*, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency
  - (e) To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment
  - (f) To participate in all community activities
  - (g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes
  - (h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

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## CEDAW OPTIONAL PROTOCOL

The Optional Protocol was opened for signature, ratification and accession on 10 December 1999, and entered into force on 22 December 2000. As of 1 June 2004, 60 States parties to the Convention had become party to the Optional Protocol.