

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, BAN KI-MOON

MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN

15 October 2012

Rural women produce much of the world's food, care for the environment and help reduce the risk of disaster in their communities. Yet they continue to face disadvantages and discrimination that prevent them from realizing their potential.

For too many rural women, their daily reality is one in which they do not own the land they farm, are denied the financial services that could lift them out of poverty, and live without the guarantee of basic nutrition, health services and amenities such as clean water and sanitation. Unpaid care work imposes a heavy burden and prevents their access to decent wage employment.

Empowering rural women is crucial for ending hunger and poverty. By denying women rights and opportunities, we deny their children and societies a better future.

This is why the United Nations recently launched a programme to empower rural women and enhance food security. The joint programme of the three Rome-based food and agricultural organizations and UN Women will work with rural women to remove the barriers they face, and to boost their skills as producers, leaders and entrepreneurs.

When food and nutrition security are improved, rural women have more opportunities to find decent work and provide for the education and health of their children. With equal access to land, credit and productive resources, rural women can increase their productivity and sell their goods. As equal members of society, rural women can raise their voices as decision-makers and propel sustainable development.

The world has increasingly recognized the vital role that women play in building peace, justice and democracy. As we approach the 2015 deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, it is time to invest more in rural women, protect their rights, and improve their status. On this International Day, I call

on all partners to support rural women, listen to their voices and ideas, and ensure that policies respond to their needs and demands. Let us do everything we can to enable them to reach their potential for the benefit of all.