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Final

High Level Event

*Step It Up Together with Rural Women to End
Hunger and Poverty*

Keynote address by

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Rome

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Your Highness Princess Victoria,

Excellencies,

Esteemed Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is my very great pleasure to be here today to honour the work of rural women, and their critical role in ending poverty and hunger.

2. It has been said that women are the backbone of rural societies. They grow and process food. But more than that, it is women who make sure their families are fed and nourished. It is women who see that children are clothed and, where possible, educated.

3. Too often, however, being the “backbone of society” is another way of saying that rural women do backbreaking work for little pay.

4. Too often, rural women are shut out of decisions that affect their lives and their families.

5. Too often, they have no access to credit and financial services; to education and healthcare.

6. Too often, they lack rights to the land they farm and even to the homes where they live.

7. And too often, women and girls are not afforded the most basic of human rights.

8. Yet, as we all know, when women are empowered — socially and politically, as well as economically — everyone benefits.

9. When you invest in a man, you invest in an individual. When you invest in a woman, you invest in a community.

10. And there is good evidence that a woman's education, health, nutritional status and decision-making power have significant impact on the health and nutritional status of her children.

11. Gender equality and empowering women and girls is not limited to the fifth Sustainable Development Goal. It is inextricably linked to the goals of ending poverty and of zero hunger.

12. Empowering women is indeed empowering humanity.

13. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the governments of Norway and Sweden for their generous contributions to the "Joint Programme Accelerating Progress Towards Rural Women Economic Power".

14. The programme has already enabled 7,500 women to receive training on improved agricultural technologies; 4,000 women to have access to financial services, and 6,500 women to improve their incomes through business development support. This is an impressive achievement over a relatively short time.

15. At IFAD, empowering women has been a cornerstone of our work since we started operations nearly 40 years ago.

16. IFAD's gender policy is helping us mainstream gender in all areas -- be it water, livestock or farming practice. And we are taking this work one step further through our pioneering work in household methodologies.

17. Through household methodologies, we are transforming underlying social norms, attitudes, behaviours and social systems.

18. Let me give you an example.

19. In rural areas, women rarely have secure or even equal rights to land and property. Without this security, they become locked in a cycle of poverty and hunger.

20. With this in mind, an IFAD-supported project in Ethiopia issued land certificates to all women who headed households. In married households, farmland was co-registered to the husband and wife.

21. As a result of this improved security, women were able to invest their time, effort and money in the land. They planted perennials and trees, and used soil and water conservation methods to increase the productivity of their plots.

22. As their income rose, they bought more food and raised poultry and cattle. Family diet improved.

23. And by owning assets, the women gained recognition as landowners within their communities. They joined land administration committees and became arbitrators in land disputes.

24. Some 450,000 households have benefitted from the project.

Ladies and gentlemen,

25. We see time and time again that gender equality opens doors for entire communities to strengthen their food and nutrition security and to improve their social and economic well-being.

26. But to achieve gender equality, we need universal recognition of the vital role women play in the rural economy.

27. To enable women to participate in social, political and economic activities, we need to improve rural infrastructure and services. We need to support women's organizations. And we need to make sure that rural women have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

28. To expand the options of rural women and girls, we need to end gender-based violence and discrimination that inflict so much damage.

29. We have talked about gender equality for many years now. But change does not just happen; it has to be made to happen.

30. So today, let us commit – as Rome-based agencies, as development partners, as

governments and leaders -- to empowering women to achieve food and nutrition security. Not just through the Joint Programme, but through all the work we do -- together and independently -- on the ground. We must do this for the sake of all rural women, and for their families and communities.

31. Thank you.