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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

Half-day discussion on rural women Australian Statement

7 October 2013

Australia has a long history of working to address the specific needs and challenges faced by women in its rural and remote communities. One third of all Australian women live in regional communities. While compared to other countries, the number of women living in rural communities in Australia is low, the vastness of Australia and the isolation of our rural areas present particular challenges.

Women in rural areas often face multiple disadvantages including remoteness from services and decision making. Access to education, economic opportunities, technologies, justice, healthcare, safe housing and other support services can be especially difficult in rural areas, particularly for Indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Australia's efforts to ensure women and girls reach their full potential focus both nationally and through our aid program on improving women's access to services, ending violence against women and supporting survivors of violence, and ensuring women are empowered by and included in policy development and decisions.

As we have seen in our own experience, regional, rural and remote make a strong contribution to economic and social development. These women should feature in our efforts, both national and international, to advance the status of women.

Removing the barriers rural women face in accessing key services can have a significant impact. For example, facilitating access to education and training can lead directly to better employment opportunities and decent work, and enables women to become drivers of economic growth.

Access to information and communications technologies can also be an enabling factor. In Australia, we are working to improve access to these technologies in rural and remote areas, including through programs such as Digital Hubs, which provides digital literacy training and demonstrates the benefits of these technologies to local communities. This will improve rural women's access health, education, government services, and business and employment opportunities. It will also help rural women overcome physical and social isolation by enabling greater interaction with the wider community and increasing access to support networks.

Globally, Australia's aid program delivers much needed investment in women and girls' education, training and leadership, and in providing the resources to allow them to enter into new business ventures, access credit and enter markets.

Australia's aid program is supporting the GSMA mWomen program which aims to expand mobile telephone access to poor women; increasing their ability to benefit from life-enhancing services including in finance, health and education.

Women from rural and remote communities who experience violence also face the added burden of social isolation and increased difficulty in accessing support services. Eliminating violence against women through comprehensive national responses improves their ability to contribute socially and economically to the development of their community and country.