



**Statement at CEDAW Committee Half Day of General Discussion on Rural Women  
October 7, 2013**

Thank you for the opportunity to address the CEDAW Committee on this half day of general discussion on rural women. The Center for Reproductive Rights, a global human rights organization with offices around the world and headquarters in New York, has fought for over 20 years to ensure that reproductive freedom for women, including rural women, is a basic human right that states must respect, protect, and fulfill.

As the enjoyment of reproductive rights impacts on almost every aspect of a woman's life – including her health, employment, economic status, and personal empowerment – states have a particular obligation to ensure access to the full range of reproductive health services in order to promote women's substantive equality.

Too often, however, women face legal or practical restrictions on their exercise of reproductive rights. The barriers that all women face in exercising reproductive rights are compounded for rural women.

Rural women are more likely to live in poverty, which means that fees for reproductive health services have a larger impact on their livelihoods. They are also more likely to live far away from health facilities, making access services more difficult and costly in both time and resources. Furthermore, rural women may be disproportionately affected by state-imposed legal restrictions on reproductive rights, including waiting periods, third-party medical authorization requirements, or restrictions on access to abortion.

As a result of the multiple discrimination that rural women often face, their reproductive health outcomes are substantially worse than those of other women. Poverty, lack of information, and few trained health providers in their areas means that rural women face higher levels of maternal mortality, a higher unmet need for contraception, and are more likely to seek unsafe abortion than their urban counterparts, a situation that puts their health and lives at risk.

The CEDAW Committee has made clear that promoting substantive equality for women requires states to take affirmative measures to ensure that all women have equal access to a wide range of reproductive health services.

In order to overcome the barriers that rural women face in exercising their reproductive rights, states should ensure that a wide range of reproductive health information and services, including contraception and abortion, are legal, physically accessible, and provided free or at a low cost to rural women so that they can make meaningful choices about their reproductive health. States should also repeal laws that place a disproportionate burden on rural women's access to reproductive health services, including laws that require waiting periods or provide that a third party such as a spouse, a judge, or a parent consent to those services. In implementing these proactive measures, states will take an important step towards respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the reproductive rights of rural women, including dignity and equality.