

Honourable Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ministers, and civil society members,

I am speaking here today on behalf of the Canadian Federation of University Women and the International Alliance of Women. We welcome the opportunity to address this assembly and we acknowledge the privilege that we have to do so.

Rural women and girls are among the world's most marginalized populations. They have consistently been at the bottom of development measures, and are still facing overwhelming gender inequalities and discrimination. At this point in history there is an urgency for member states, in collaboration with civil society, to make gender equality comprehensive. Rural women can no longer be excluded from the conversation, particularly racialized women, Indigenous women, migrant women, women from gender and sexual minorities, and women with disabilities.

Based on the research we have conducted among rural women and community organizations, the transportation gap and the lack of available public services are undeniable challenges that clearly influence a woman's experience in rural settings. Rural women are challenged with reduced access to training, education, employment, child care services as well as health and mental health services; all essential determinants in women's empowerment. Moreover, the isolation, the limited access to safe transportation and support services also increases women's vulnerability to violence.

Strategies to reduce or remove the barriers and to increase the availability of resources and services for women and girls must be prioritized when developing public policy and programs targeting rural and remote areas.

We urge member states to adopt the following recommendations:

- Address mobility barriers by improving public transportation infrastructure and technology infrastructure
- Create incentives for professional workers to work in rural regions and increase the presence of community-based solutions to challenges
- Increase funding to ensure comprehensive, accessible health and mental health services; including sexual and reproductive health
- Ensure that women and girls are legally protected from any form of violence, and have access to legal resources
- Guarantee core-funding for shelters and affordable housing
- Ensure access to quality public education at all levels, including early learning and affordable childcare services to enable rural women to access education opportunities, retraining and employment.

We stay attentive to the outcome of this meeting in generating concerted actions within member states, and we salute the dedication of country representatives, but especially the relentless work of women's organizations across the world in advancing rural women's rights.