

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE ON THE FIRST OBSERVANCE
OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN
15 October 2008**

I welcome the opportunity to pay tribute to the valuable contributions made by rural women, including indigenous women, to agriculture and development. This first International Day of Rural Women is especially timely, as it comes in the midst of a world food crisis and global financial turmoil, and on the eve of World Food Day.

Rural women produce more than half of the world's food and provide immeasurable support to local communities. But despite the life-saving role they play, these women are seldom adequately appreciated or compensated.

Women farmers in developing countries do most of the agricultural work, but they own just a tiny fraction of the land. Disproportionately poor and illiterate, they are rarely included in decision-making that affects their circumstances.

Our mission is to foster a world where the woman who farms is also a woman with educational opportunities, political access, and a voice at the negotiating table. A woman with a market environment that favours a fair return on her investments of equipment, seeds and labour. A woman who benefits from the land, credit and new technologies that will increase production.

We know that when we empower rural women, we enhance the well-being of their children, their families, their communities and, ultimately, their countries. At the same time, we must recognize that improvements in roads, health care, water and sanitation systems and environmental protection will elevate not only women but society as a whole.

I urge all countries to seize the opportunity we will have next month at the Conference on Financing for Development in Doha to put the needs of rural women at the top of the global agenda. By making women active partners in addressing the world's pressing food crisis, we can do much more than solve the immediate problem; we can pave the way for a more secure global future. On this Day, let us commit to that mission.