

## OPENING REMARKS

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**Distinguished guests, dear colleagues, dear friends,**

It is a great pleasure to be with you in İzmir today. This gathering carries a particular significance. The United Nations has designated 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, a global recognition that women are central to agrifood systems, food security, nutrition, and economic resilience, yet their contributions remain among the most undervalued in every economy.

Women make up **41 per cent** of the global agrifood workforce. They produce food, manage livestock, sustain households, and hold communities together. Despite this, they work on smaller plots than men, **earn 78 cents for every dollar men earn** in agricultural wage employment, and carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work that amounts to **at least 10.8 trillion dollars globally** each year. Closing the gender gap in farm productivity and wages alone could raise global GDP by nearly **one trillion dollars** and reduce food insecurity for **45 million people**.

In Türkiye, these realities are deeply felt. UN Women Türkiye's report, ***Women in Rural Türkiye: Navigating Barriers in Access to Resources, Services, and Decision-Making***, based on research across 26 of the 81 provinces -, documents that rural women make vital contributions to agriculture and household economies, yet their needs, priorities and concerns remain largely invisible in policymaking. They work predominantly as unpaid family workers, often without social security. They face restricted access to credit, markets, training, and technology. And their participation in decision-making remains severely limited. This is not because rural women lack capacity. It is because the systems around them have not been built to include them.

The normative framework is clear. Türkiye ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, and it became effective in the country in 1986. Article 14 of CEDAW is dedicated entirely to rural women, making it the only international treaty article that specifically addresses their unique circumstances. It calls on States to ensure rural women's right to participate in development planning, to access health care, social security, education and training, to organize cooperatives, to access agricultural credit and appropriate technology, and to enjoy adequate living conditions, including housing, sanitation, electricity, water, and transport. These are not aspirations. They are obligations. And every one of them remains unfinished business.

Climate change compounds these challenges. Each day of extreme high temperatures reduces the total value of crops produced by women farmers **by three per cent** relative to men. Under worst-case scenarios, climate change could push up to **158 million more women and girls into extreme poverty** by 2050. Yet **only 39 per cent of countries** integrate gender into climate policy, and **less than one per cent** of

climate-related development assistance reaches women's rights organizations. Rural women are on the front lines of the climate crisis, yet largely absent from the spaces where climate decisions are made. When women participate in climate policy and agricultural planning, the outcomes are more effective and more sustainable. Their leadership is not a secondary concern. It is a precondition for resilient food systems and resilient communities.

Rural women's voices must be heard at every table where decisions are made, from local planning to national policy to global forums. At UN Women Türkiye, we work with national partners to amplify these voices, to ensure they shape the policies and frameworks that affect their lives. But we have also learned that reaching broader publics, building genuine understanding of why gender equality matters, sometimes requires exploring unusual paths. Because data and policy language, as essential as they are, do not always reach the hearts and minds of those who need to hear these stories most.

This is where art becomes indispensable. Art is a universal language. It makes the invisible visible. It confronts realities in their full depth and reaches broader publics precisely because it speaks to something beyond statistics and frameworks. Our publication, *Art and Creativity for Gender Equality*, documents how creative expression, what many call activism, has been central to our work at UN Women Türkiye, connecting gender equality with audiences that conventional advocacy cannot always reach.

This is precisely why, from 11 to 27 March, in partnership with the Embassy of Mexico, UN Women Türkiye organized a photographic exhibition. The exhibition brought together three powerful narratives: Mariana Yampolsky, documenting the everyday lives, rituals, and cultural expressions of rural communities in Mexico; Dilan Bozyel, presenting portraits of women from the seven regions of Anatolia; and Ali Saltan, capturing women he encounters across different places and moments. Their works explore the connections between women's bodies, their social lives, and the places they inhabit. Today's gathering is a continuation of this effort, and it matters deeply, because these photographs and works of art develop a language that policy documents cannot. They show us what equality, and its absence, truly look like.

**Dear colleagues,**

I am attending this gathering following my participation to the 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, which has just concluded. CSW70 focused on women's access to justice, and the Agreed Conclusions were adopted. For the first time in the Commission's history, the Agreed Conclusions were put to a recorded vote rather than adopted by consensus. For decades, this process worked through consensus. The fact that a vote was necessary at all tells us how serious the pushback against gender equality has become, even in spaces specifically designed to protect it. The normative space we have built over three decades is under real pressure. Language is being narrowing. Commitments are being diluted. This is the context in which we work, and it is the context in which gatherings like this one become not only relevant, but necessary.

Looking ahead, the 71st session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2027 will focus on accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with the review

theme drawing on the agreed conclusions from CSW66 on climate change, environmental, and disaster risk reduction. This is directly connected to what we are discussing here today: the lives of rural women, the impact of climate on their livelihoods, and the urgency of ensuring their voices shape the responses. As we approach the final stretch towards the 2030 targets, the urgency of delivering on our commitments to women and girls will only grow.

What we need now is to come together to move forward, through exchange, engagement, and shared solutions. Through partnerships across governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, and across generations, we can translate commitments into real change in the lives of women and girls. Rural women are not waiting for us to act on their behalf. They are leading, producing, sustaining, and organizing. Our task, with them, is to remove the barriers that hold them back, to invest in their rights and capabilities, and to ensure their voices shape the decisions that affect their lives.

UN Women remains your committed partner in this work. Together, we can build a Türkiye, and a world, where rural women's contributions are recognized, their rights are realized, and their leadership is at the centre of every response.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the İzmir Commodity Exchange and the FAO Türkiye for inviting us to participate in this event and all of you with us today. Thank you.