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Partnership for the empowerment of the vulnerable women and girls
13 March 2018 || 5:30PM to 8:00PM
Ground Floor Event Space, Yuchengco Museum, RCBC Plaza, Makati City,
Philippines

Speech delivered by Mary Jane N Real
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The global theme for International Women's Day "*Time is Now: Rural and Urban Activists Transforming Women's Lives*" puts a spotlight on the critical role that **activists** play in transforming lives worldwide. Contrary to a common notion that they are a nuisance, rural and urban activists have been trailblazers in incorporating feminist perspectives in laws and policies; altering discriminatory cultural norms and practices; lobbying for equitable distribution of resources; and painstakingly raising consciousness to propel global movements for social change. Behind every attempt at social transformation, involves an activist for women's rights and human rights for all.

The International Women's Day theme echoes a global call to uphold the autonomy and agency of women, as activists, in both rural and urban settings. Agency, in essence, means "the capacity to make decisions about one's own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free from violence, retribution or fear". Agency, as it has been articulated in development parlance, has both intrinsic and instrumental values. Intrinsically, the ability to exercise choice and to take action is important in its own right. It also has instrumental value – that is, expanding agency is likely to bring broad gains for human rights and development. Upholding women's agency then is core not only to self empowerment, but also in development of all.

The theme of the International Women's Day, which juxtaposes rural and urban activists, also draws attention to the interconnectedness of contemporary issues besetting women across geographies: an urban poor woman and her family evicted out of the slums, and inadequately relocated in Metro Manila is in a similar distressed state as a Cambodian woman and her family dispossessed of land and livelihood due to State-sanctioned land grabbing in Battambang, Cambodia; the fear felt by lesbians persecuted by fundamentalist groups in Aceh, Indonesia is mirrored in the faces of Muslim women and their families attacked recently by Buddhist zealots in Kandy, Sri Lanka; the labeling of women human rights defenders as 'sorcerers' in the highlands of Papua New Guinea is the same form of modern-day 'witch-hunting' employed against those who critique the government. This interconnectedness of issues – between rural and urban, across countries and regions, among the martial law and the millennial generations – underscores the necessity for actions of solidarity at a global scale in every possible level.

So it is fitting that on the occasion of celebrating the theme of International Women's Day, we are bringing together in this forum "violence against women" and "women's economic empowerment" to forge "solidarity in this advocacy" to transform women's lives.

In the first global systematic study of the prevalence of violence against women and girls released by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners in 2013, about 35% of women worldwide have experienced either intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence. Higher than the global average, prevalence rates in Southeast Asia was estimated at 40%. In Western Pacific, it was close to 30%, although in subsequent studies the percentage doubled, between 60% and 68%.¹ The level of violence, however, varies greatly between countries and even within countries. For example, also released in 2013, data from Asia Pacific specifically on men's perpetration of intimate partner violence show a dramatic range between 26% (Indonesia rural site) and 80% (Bougainville, Papua New Guinea).²

These figures indicate that gender-based violence continues to be a global epidemic affecting more women particularly in the Asia and Pacific region. Reports on interventions to address gender-based violence have shown that increase in women's personal income and economic independence has opened options for victims to leave violent relationships and over time, it has also boosted their self-confidence to participate in public affairs, including eventually becoming active advocates for their rights. In essence, multiple strategies of increasing women's voice and participation **and** building their aspirations to be free from violence **and** opening up new economic opportunities have resulted in more expansive expressions of women's agency and women's empowerment overall.

Linking "violence against women" and "women's economic empowerment" in this forum therefore provides a linchpin of opportunities for women to make autonomous choices to improve their lives. It invites survivors and advocates against gender-based violence to interact with social entrepreneurs and together create campaigns, such as the Great Women Doll Advocacy, to generate resources towards the upliftment of marginalized women and girls. It opens a platform for victims and survivors of gender-based violence to forge their own personal transformation and become empowered economic agents in

1 World Health Organization (WHO), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council. 2013. Global and regional estimates of violence against women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence in http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625_eng.pdf

2 Fulu, E. et. al. 2013. Prevalence and risk factors for male perpetration of intimate partner violence: finding from the UN multi-country cross-sectional study on men and violence in Asia and the Pacific. Lancet Global Health cited in Sexual Violence Research Initiative. June 2014. What do we know about violence against women and girls and what more do we need to know to prevent it? A Summary of the Evidence <http://www.svri.org/generaldocs.htm>

society. This forum brings together two disparate groups of actors, who seldom meet and often wary of each other, to find common ground and launch a shared advocacy.

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights Asia and Pacific (UAF A&P) shares in this advocacy to harness women's economic empowerment in concerted efforts to end gender-based violence. Established in 1997, UAF has been in existence for 20 years. It celebrated its 20th anniversary last year with the launch of UAF Asia and Pacific, the latest among a consortium of four sister funds in USA, Latin America, Africa, and now Asia and Pacific. UAF pioneered the model of rapid response grantmaking, responding within 72 hours to requests for grants from women and non-binary activists in danger. As part of its rapid response grant making, its DNA, UAF A&P further aims to expand the development of "webs of safety and care", a community building model of mobilizing resources to strengthen collective, multi-level protection and support for activists on the ground.

UAF A&P anchors its programmes on "resourcing resilience" as its framework. It acknowledges that building the resilience of activists amidst challenging global and national contexts requires sustainable resourcing beyond requesting for occasional donations or submitting funding proposals to institutional donors. UAF A&P, through its network of Women of Courage Asia and Pacific, is invested in contributing towards a solidarity economy that functions not only socially through forging webs of sharing and caring for activists, but also economically, through collaborative ventures to finance initiatives for women's human rights. The network, at its incipient stage, brings together women philanthropists, social entrepreneurs and women leaders from Asia and the Pacific to re-imagine the culture of giving in the region. It aims to establish a strong network of women philanthropists who would take collective leadership with UAF A&P in growing a constituency of donors who invest not only in charitable causes, but boldly support advocacy for women's human rights, and explore new ways of generating resources toward building the resiliency of activists in Asia and Pacific.

UAF A&P joins ECHOSi Foundation-GREAT Women, Zonta International Club of Alabang and all the partners present this evening on this important occasion to launch of the GREAT Women Doll Advocacy.