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Statement submitted by International Presentation Association, and Red Dot Foundation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

International Presentation Association and Red Dot Foundation welcome the United Nations decision to choose the above Priority Theme for the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Digital transformation and technological innovation represent opportunities and challenges across societies and countries in relation to gender equality. The use of digital technologies has substantial potential for economic empowerment of women and girls and can contribute to greater gender equality. Access to the Internet and to digital devices and respective services can provide women with new or further employment opportunities and knowledge, giving them the possibility to earn additional income.

However, the unprecedented growth in connectivity and use of the internet are not enjoyed equally. Gender analysis of the use of technology reveals an unequal power relationship between women and men. In low- and middle-income countries, 433 million women are unconnected and 165 million fewer women own a mobile phone compared with men. Boys are 1.5 times more likely to own a phone than girls in many countries (UN Women, 2020).

A key structural challenge is the significant under-representation of women in information and communications technology (ICT) jobs and in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) professions. Men are four times more likely than women to be information and communications technology specialists (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). The absence of women's voices and perspectives in these sectors impacts the design of technology and results in the embedding of inequalities and systematic biases. The gender digital divide contributes to further discrimination and violence against women and girls. Gender-based violence itself further exacerbates the gender digital divide.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted women's and girls' lives in a context of rapidly expanding digitalization. Access to work, education, services and social activities became online creating both benefits and barriers around the world. In education, the use of digital technology and relevant tools has been increased with the aim to help teachers and students advancing learning and mitigating the loss due to school closures. However, in many countries young women and girls have not benefited equally or in the same ways as men and boys. The crisis has starkly highlighted the inequalities in digital access. This was evident especially in rural poor areas.

Boys were prioritized, for example, when there was only one computer or one phone within the family. During lockdowns, the support for gender-based violence victims was offered digitally, restricting the accessibility and quality of support. Lack of privacy and physical distance from abusers, restricted broadband, internet connectivity and affordability were some of the restrictions for women accessing online support services. In certain regions of India, the reliance on digital technology for support from domestic violence exists with the stereotype whereby women having access to mobile phones is a sign of promiscuity. This stereotype further complicates how a domestic violence survivor might navigate support since owning a mobile may further inflict forms of violence. We need to be extremely cautious when implementing digital solutions to ensure that they do not lead to further division.

International Presentation Association and Red Dot Foundation consider online and offline formal and informal education as powerful tools not only in responding to and advocating against violence, but also in dismantling gender stereotypes, hence preventing violence from occurring before it even starts. The empowerment of women

and girls is further essential in eliminating harmful social norms and violence. We use digital technology and reliable data to inform evidence-based advocacy points and ask for an intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of gender violence.

In our local settings, we raise awareness and build women's and girls' capacity to acquire and use digital skills on programs about gender equality. As an example, the International Presentation Association in India has created children's parliament groups to motivate girls, especially the poorer ones who live in rural areas, to be leaders and have a voice on local issues. By using digital tools in their own computer centers, the community members raise awareness, inter alia, through online training and programs on girls' empowerment, safeguarding and gender equality. In Zimbabwe, Sisters and Presentation People use digital means to bring together women victims of violence enabling them to talk freely through online counseling platforms and support one another throughout their mental and physical abuse.

Since 2012, at the national and local levels, Red Dot Foundation has launched Safecity; an innovative free online platform that crowdsources personal stories of sexual harassment and abuse in public spaces. In 2021, the International Presentation Association decided to partner with Red Dot Foundation on the Safecity project in an effort to work together and achieve greater impact. The Safecity platform can help us create awareness on sexual abuse against women and get women and other disadvantaged communities to break their silence and report their personal experiences. The aim is to make this information available in the public domain so that people can be more situationally aware and make better choices for their safety, they can mobilize their communities around an issue, get them to take a stand and find local neighborhood solutions or demand accountability with service providers. Data is essential to help quantify and qualify problems, inform policies and design programs based on evidence.

We strongly affirm that differences in access to digital resources and knowledge, together with gender norms and perceptions of technology, can sideline women and girls from technological developments. Advancements in digital transformation can only go hand in hand with advancements in gender equality through addressing the digital gender divide such as gender gaps in access to and use of digital technologies, in digital-related education, in entrepreneurship.

Societies with greater equality between women and men can also perform better in the area of the digital economy which is vital for sustainable economic growth (European Union Gender Equality Index, Digital Economy and Society Index, 2020).

We urge Member States to:

Provide access to quality and affordable lifelong education for all, especially for women and children survivors of gender-based violence;

Work in partnership with civil society organizations worldwide to support innovative projects and knowledge sharing activities to strengthen learning and contribute to the elimination of gender-based violence;

Close the digital divide and leverage the power of technology to accelerate learning and support skills development by investing in digital infrastructure (connectivity, devices and software);

Develop programmes that equip young girls with digital literacy and skills at an early age, to ensure they access formal employment and entrepreneurship;

Ensure women and girls access, free of charge, to a universally recognized digital skills training and certification programmes, through online training and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workshops;

Enhance access to welfare services, identification (ID), and financial services and information for all women to narrow gender digital gaps;

Empower women's and girls' leadership skills for increased participation in decision-making at all levels, including at home, in school, in workplaces and within society;

Increase economic opportunities and employment for women by providing them with job skills and training to reduce women's vulnerability to violence;

Address violence against women and girls in digital contexts, following the Secretary General's report on the "Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women" (August 2022).

Endorsed by

Casa Generalizia della Societa' del Sacro Cuore, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregation of the Mission, Edmund Rice International Limited, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate, Loretto Community (Sisters of Loretto), Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Passionists International, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Charity Federation, Soroptimist International, UNANIMA International.
