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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-seventh session

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

**Statement submitted 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, Edmund Rice International Limited, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Loreto Generalate, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, and UNANIMA International, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd welcomes the priority theme of the Sixty-seventh Session of the Commission on the Status of Women focusing on “innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.”

### Global Context

UN Women’s Report on “Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022,” underlined the dangerously slow advancement on Sustainable Development Goal 5 — the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. More specifically, a large gender gap persists across all areas, including in the field of innovation and technology. At the current rate of progress, it may take another 286 years to remove discriminatory laws and close prevailing gaps to achieve full gender equality for women and girls. We hear the call continually for accelerated action, but the reality is that women and girls are experiencing a backlash and reversal of hard achieved gains within the current political climate, such that we can no longer remain silent. The toll on women and girls, human rights defenders, and climate activists is alarming. Addressing innovation and technological change and education in the digital age during the Commission is hypocritical if women and girls are not being accorded their basic human rights. There is no doubt that ongoing innovative and technological developments can be the key to unlock and accelerate gender equality and the upholding of all human rights. However, as the future is being shaped at an alarming speed by innovative and technological developments, the reality is that many of these achievements expose women and girls to further abuse and additional human rights violations.

### Linking Gender and Technology

This Commission provides a concrete opportunity to mitigate the harms caused by technology and unlock its potential power towards gender equality and the inclusion longed for by all women and girls. With this in mind, we urge Member States to challenge their long held traditional mindsets and create a realistic plan of action that intentionally directs innovation and technology towards such empowerment and bridges the gender gap. The elimination of “all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation,” is foundational to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5.2. Such implementation demands structural and systemic changes. The backlash, the reversal of rights and the increase in violence against women and girls, is perpetrated by mindsets that promote and enforce patriarchal systems and structures that are reinforced by male-formulated policies. These policies have already infected and spewed into innovative and technological breakthroughs, manipulating them toward the continuance of inequality, power, profit and the exploitation of women, girls, and mother earth.

Technology has been utilized to perpetuate the control of women’s agency and sexuality and the continued harassment and violence against women and girls. Technology has opened the door to perpetrators through a screen that exposes women, girls, and children to all types of harm, even within the home. Technology has facilitated the rapid global expansion of human trafficking as a criminal industry, which has increased the demand for women and girls as objects of exploitation, prostitution, and violence. The time is characterized by the absence of legislation to protect women and girls from the corrupted use of technology, seen in practices such

as doxing, collector culture, theft, deep-fake, revenge porn, and multiple other forms of online harassment and violence, with perpetrators enjoying and profiting with impunity. The huge volume of online sexual exploitation of children globally is a feature of a society without a moral compass.

Targets 5.a and 5.b of the Sustainable Development Goals pledge to “undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources...” and “enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.” These remain rhetorical as long as patriarchal mindsets do not change the dominant role that neo liberal capitalism holds in the global financial architecture and in governance. The disparity between the accumulation of extreme wealth and the inescapability from extreme poverty offends the dignity of women and girls. Lack of access to technology is a product of the disparity and inequality that women and girls have to endure. In a world where technology is becoming ever more prevalent this lack of access only reinforces discrimination and exploitation and is detrimental to the progress of women and girls.

### Holistic Solutions

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, as an organization, commenced using technology in a holistic way during the COVID-19 Pandemic, recognizing its power for connectivity across multiple countries. It enabled us to hold global meetings and to maintain contact within and across projects. During this process we became acutely aware of the existing digital gender gap and the appalling lack of infrastructure in rural areas, which exacerbate exclusion and reinforces gender inequality. Further we are alarmed at the escalation of cyber violence and bullying and how the internet is being manipulated for online child sexual exploitation and human trafficking. To address this issue with girls specifically in Asia Pacific, a Good Cyber Practice Workshop took place over six weeks having over one hundred participants. Some members of the group are now developing a Framework for Good Cyber Practice for use more broadly with the aim that all women and girls have sufficient safe and equitable access to digital spaces, enabling their empowerment emotionally, physically, spiritually, mentally, and intellectually – now and into the future. The International Day of the Girl Advocates 2021 launched “Girls with Girls for Girls Project” in November of that year. Girls from Central India, Indonesia, Philippines, South West India, and Sri Lanka with knowledge and training, set about providing access through their specific project to reach out to girls who do not have access, opportunity, or digital literacy to engage online. These projects led to new initiatives – conversation circles across provinces and between counties, education, and the enjoyment of safe spaces with mentors to facilitate a hands-on approach to build digital literacy skills for those who needed it.

While addressing access and literacy our organization is also confronted, on a daily basis with the harms of the digital platforms where girls and children meet exploiters and traffickers online. This is followed by in person meetings ending up in child labour, sexual abuse, and trafficking into prostitution. This occurs due to using technology with poor protection, lack of supervision, and impunity.

Women leaders in various projects acknowledge the value of internet technologies in their co-operatives and farming projects, to keep connected and share their learnings on sustainable farming and other developments. In Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo, mobile technology is used effectively to transport surplus local produce to market areas at a distance from the source. Sometimes this connectivity is simply the mobile phone providing opportunities to easily contact a doctor or veterinary doctor. Women’s empowerment projects with a sales component have found that a website has offered them a global platform where they can showcase their products and engage with potential global markets.

### Conclusion

We have a vision that all persons, including women and girls, ought to share equally in innovation and technological developments irrespective of where they live on the planet.

### Recommendations

We call on all the Members States to:

- Speed up the preparation of the proposed “Convention on countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes”, to ensure that such a global instrument has the needed legislative requirements and resources towards full implementation, so as to enforce zero tolerance of any and every breach of the Convention;
- Provide the necessary infrastructure, which is affordable, to facilitate equal access for all - no matter where one lives on the planet;
- Scrutinize with a gender lens innovations and technological developments to detect and remove possible harms to people and planet;
- Innovate and legislate for the use of technology for the common good of people and planet in this era of a ‘code red’ for humanity;
- Implement and accelerate actions in compliance with all previous United Nations Conventions.

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