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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 Christian Conference of Asia, a non-governmental organization 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

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), a regional ecumenical organisation comprised of 98 member churches and 21 national ecumenical councils, and representing 45 million Christians from Japan in the east to Iran in the west, and from Nepal in the north to New Zealand in the south, welcomes the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women's focus on the priority theme, "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls" and the review theme, "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls". As a faith-based organisation, the CCA advocates for a focus on these areas as part of its regular programmatic involvement.

The Gender Digital Divide

Recent frontier technology and innovation have profoundly transformed society offering unprecedented opportunities and challenges. Technology and innovation have inseparable and deep connections with gender equality because of their powerful impact on the economy, offering 'leapfrog' opportunities with their capacity to expand access to meaningful employment, communication, and financial or business services.

However, of the 2.9 billion people still offline, the majority are women and girls who are less likely to own a mobile phone, use the internet, or know how to leverage digital technology. Although the COVID-19 pandemic hastened the mainstreaming of digital services and onboarding of those who were not yet engaged with online or digital technologies, there was a reinforcement of gender stereotypes that discriminate against women and girls. Thus, digital technologies, platforms, and tools must be designed to be safe, inclusive, and accessible from the start. The world must share a common vision for digital cooperation that is grounded on digital safety, security, and trust to realise the full potential of positive technology usage for connectivity and prosperity.

The instrumentalization of digital tools and technology to support women's empowerment necessitates first the ending of online violence against women. Violence against women, both online and offline, is a manifestation of the systemic marginalisation of women throughout society. The main targets of online violence and abuse are women and girls, particularly those who are more likely to experience numerous and overlapping forms of discrimination. As a result, they are pushed out of public participation, opportunity utilisation, online conversation, and digital spaces more broadly. Online presence, participation, privacy and data must be protected using human rights principles that encourage accountability and deter exploitation or discrimination.

The Gender Employment And Skills Gap

Even if there has been progress in Asia towards gender equality in the workplace, women still face additional difficulties in the age of automation, given the lack of skills and connectivity. It is only recently that Asian states are taking into consideration the impact of the digital economy on the world of work and women. Supporting women to benefit from such technological innovations will mean higher labour force participation. The effects of automation on women's employment and their role in Asia's economic development are routinely overlooked, although the low-paid, lower-skill positions that women typically hold are those that are most vulnerable to automation. Additionally, although women in Asia can now access a growing online gig economy that allows for flexible and independent work arrangements via digital platforms, it can become a yet-another sector that reinforces

gender stereotypes under precarious working conditions given the high degrees of informality and lack of regulation. Job equality must go hand in hand with job quality. The empowerment of women to take up high-skilled science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) jobs should be more intentional and concerted.

This must be supplemented with broader campaigns to facilitate the overall labour market participation of women through the provision of support services and the redistribution of care work that allow women to pursue meaningful and stable careers while not compromising on their familial responsibilities.

Key Gender-Related Policy Recommendations

The Christian Conference of Asia calls upon member states to:

1. Establish, bolster, and advance public commitments to digital literacy, entrepreneurial education, and skills endowment for the confidence-building and empowerment of women and girls;
2. Encourage stronger government-backed STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and STEM-related investments and initiatives to support women as innovators and entrepreneurs;
3. Integrate gender equality, accountability, and non-discrimination into policy and practice surrounding emerging digital tools and technologies;
4. Collect, track, and report sex-disaggregated and gender-specific data in the usage of, and, in employment in, tech and innovation for evidence-based policy, monitoring, and solutions, to measure gaps and progress for gender equality;
5. Fulfil obligations to protect individuals, especially women and girls, from harm, including non-physical violence such as online sexual exploitation that can, at times, surpass the harm of physical violence;
6. Promote the digital commons as a global public good that is safe for communication and employment, and that protects identities and data, through the elimination of unscrupulous, fraudulent, or exploitative digital tools and technologies;
7. Partner with businesses and corporations for structured bridging programmes, for building strong women's networks, and ensure that best practices are leveraged across all technology sectors.