Economic and Social Council

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 Human Rights Advocates Inc., 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.

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* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

Technology and innovation are providing the catalyst for women and girls to exercise their rights and advance their social and economic status around the world. Social media has become a tool to reach global audiences in the fight for equality. Mobile data has increased the connectivity of rural women and girls. Innovative national curriculum are providing some girls with essential digital literacy education. However, women and girls remain disproportionately disconnected in what is now known as the "gender digital divide." This divide is exacerbated by an increasing frequency of online gender-based violence, disparities in science, technology, engineering, and math education and discrimination in technology and innovation careers for women and girls. Human Rights Advocates Inc. calls on Member States to prioritize the rights of women and girls to end the gender digital divide. Member States must uphold their duties under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and affirm their commitments to the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Progress on the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development hinges on bridging the gender digital divide. To this end, Member States must implement national policies that allow women and girls to freely exercise their rights online, ensure academic institutions prepare girls for their digital future, and remove barriers women continue to face in science, technology, engineering and math careers. The Commission on the Status of Women, at its sixty-seventh session, must adopt a rights-based approach to ending the gender digital divide. Following are some suggestions to accomplish this.

1. **Inequitable Education and Labour Market Discrimination Devalues Women and Girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math**

Throughout the world, gender bias and stereotyping subvert the efficacy of engaging girls in science, technology, engineering and math subjects. Reinforced gender roles collectively undermine early tech intervention efforts. In the Philippines, for example, girls as young as 10 years old report believing they are less naturally adept to these subjects. (United Nations, Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022, p. 5.) The effect is a systematic steering of girls away from increasingly valuable skills and career opportunities. (Id.) The science, technology, engineering and math curriculum is too often tailored to the predominate interests of boys and limited in its representation of girls. As a result, girls are less likely to engage in these subjects.

It should then come as no surprise that entry and retention of women in the science, technology, engineering and math labour markets are disproportionate to their male counterparts. Women encompass 35% of these students in higher education but make up under 20% of science and engineering professions. (Id. At 15.) Worse still, women inventors account for less than 9% of all patent filings for innovations in G20 economies. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Bridging the Digital Gender Divide, 2018, p. 85.) The gender wage gap persisting from 3% to 27% in these fields, depending on country. (Id. At 70-71.) Pervasive gender biases and stereotyping manifest in male-dominated work environments that are inflexible and often hostile to women. Disproportionate unpaid care demands on women and under valuation are key drivers of women's attrition in the tech labour market that remain underregulated at the national level.

2. **Social Barriers to Use and Access to Technology**

While education and career disparities impact women and girls in science, technology, engineering and math, online hate speech, threats, and incitement of violence impact nearly all women and girls alike. Member States have a duty to ensure

women and girls are free from gender-based violence, regardless of where it occurs. In a study spanning 51 countries, 38% of women report personally experiencing online violence. Ninety percent of those women reported self-censoring and limiting their access to digital spaces. (United Nations, Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022, 15.) The proliferation of online gender violence creates a chilling effect on public discourse and gender mainstreaming initiatives.

For women human rights defenders, journalists and political officials, digital gender-based violence is increasingly prevalent. Marginalized women are even more impacted by violence online. (Amnesty International, Troll Patrol Findings, 2018.) In one example, the chairwoman of Right-Side NGO became the target of hate speech online for addressing the Armenian Parliament on transgender people's rights. (Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, Parliamentary Assembly reporting to the Council of Europe, Doc. 15429.) The increase in threats of gender-based violence online reflects current limitations in many domestic criminal penal codes. While threats of violence and hate speech are regulated in the "real world", many countries' laws have yet to codify protections against digital violence in alignment with their duties under international human rights norms. Therefore, those seeking to subvert political participation of women raising human rights issues can use digital spaces to intimidate and incite violence.

Further, women and girls report higher rates of concern about digital control and surveillance online than their male counterparts. At the national level, several Member States have promulgated legislation to undermine the privacy of their online users, allowing unfettered monitoring of journalists, human rights defenders and opposition groups. Locally, family and community structures that subjugate women and girls exert their control by monitoring or restricting their digital use. Policy strategies should aim to ensure better equality between genders in the digital age by addressing digital gender-based violence and privacy concerns. One example of this is South Korea's Act of Promotion of Information and Communication Network Utilization and Information Protection. (Act No. 17358, 10 Dec 2020.) Article 14 of the Act explicitly legislates the governments duty to end the gender utilization gap of internet technologies. South Korea's foreword-thinking legislation provides a model framework for national public-private collaboration.

3. Recommendations

Therefore, Human Rights Advocates recommends to the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women to urge Member States to:

– Protect women and girls, including and especially women journalists, youth activists, women in government, and people with marginalized gender identities from online gender-based violence, gendered hate speech and disinformation through engagement with key stakeholders in policy, monitoring and enforcement;

– Strengthen technology education for women and girls by engaging with curriculum that challenges cultural and systemic gender stereotyping, mitigates gendered accessibility barriers and properly equips students with tools for success in the 21st Century;

– Collect gender disaggregated data to uncover gaps and biases in the labour markets, science, technology, engineering, and math curriculum, and resulting programs;

– Cultivate enabling environments and recruit women for key leadership positions in government agencies and the private sector; and

– Adapt national development strategies that increase digital services, connectivity and human capacity in technology and innovation.

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