



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-seventh session

6–17 March 2023

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 Presbyterian Church (USA), and Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (USA), 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 Presbyterian Church (USA) and Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (USA), in covenantal relationship, welcome the opportunity to address the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women on “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.”

The world has experienced exponential growth in innovation and technology, which accelerated with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as people were forced to isolate and quarantine. Innovations in technology allowed the world to connect and function in a new virtual reality: to socialize, to conduct business, and to stay connected to family and friends. The pandemic revealed the digital divide and the vast inequalities that disproportionately impact women and girls in underserved communities.

We affirm our core belief that every person is created in the image of God, deserving of dignity and equitable treatment. We are whole human beings, connected to God, to one another and to the world. Through the Matthew 25 vision, the Presbyterian Church (USA) addresses the injustices of structural racism, systemic poverty, climate change, heteropatriarchy, and militarism that impact the most vulnerable communities, especially women and girls. We engage in this work in mutuality and partnership, making space for all people, listening to the voices of peoples long silenced, building together and living into the good news of God’s “kingdom.”

## **Reimagining and Investing in Education in the Digital Age**

Our organizations have a deep and rich history in transforming society by providing access to quality education in the United States and around the world. In hundreds of communities, we were the first to provide girls with opportunities for formal education and supported free, high quality public education through secondary school. We are committed to education as a core focus of mission to improve the quality of education for a million children in the United States of America and globally.

Lack of access to affordable quality education and digital literacy hinders the ability of women and girls to gain learning opportunities and income-generating activities. Gender discrimination, cultural prejudices, and early marriages can prevent women and girls from taking full advantage of educational opportunities.

Quality education promotes breaking down of gender stereotypes that keep girls and women away from science and technology fields. Access to science and technology is central to increasing women’s economic empowerment. However, challenges remain as women who succeed in careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields are often marginalized by patriarchal paradigms and face hostile, hypermasculine cultures and increased sexual harassment. Gender-responsive policies need to be enhanced.

In the digital age of rapidly advancing artificial intelligence, transforming education that promotes human dignity must be addressed.

## **Access to Technology**

Digital equality is necessary to achieve gender equality for women and girls. Women and girls must have equal access to technology and be full participants in innovation and technological change and transforming education in the digital age.

Access to technology such as functional digital devices, infrastructure for stable internet connection, and access to electricity are the basic components necessary for digital equality. Rural and marginalized communities that are underserved are disproportionately impacted. The virtual 66th Commission on the Status of Women highlighted this reality. Delegates from developing countries didn't have good internet connectivity; their electricity shut off during parts of the day, and they paid high internet service fees.

Working with our partners in the underserved communities, we focus on community engagement through initiatives such as: scholarships for women and girls, accessible and affordable training, using existing resources in new ways to meet the needs of a post-pandemic cyber reality. Addressing the technological disparities and providing access to learning opportunities for women and girls can lead to digital equality. We continue to address racism, gender injustice, poverty, women's health care, and marginalization that prevent women and girls from gaining equal education, marketable skills, and a chosen career path.

Women leaders in the community have been effective in establishing mutual relationships, engaging in conversations, listening to the concerns of the community, teaching, and working together to address the technical needs of the community.

## **Protect rights, safety and security of women and girls**

Innovation and technology have created means for protecting the rights, safety and security of women and girls. Online tools such as resources, websites, tracking tools, new apps, and sexual predator lists can counter sexual and gender-based violence. However, technology has also created new challenges that negatively impact the rights, safety and security of women and girls. Abuse of social media can lead to cyberbullying, online harassment, cyberstalking, or victimization (sexting or revenge porn), which endangers mental health and undermine their dignity and well-being.

Protecting human rights for women and girls must include safeguarding privacy, personal information, and implementing age-appropriate controls. Cybersecurity must counter fraud, disinformation, and hate speech, while increasing reliable verified information and providing ethical parameters for artificial intelligence. Social media and other communications platforms must take seriously their efforts to prevent harassment.

Protecting human rights for women and girls in all their diversity means continually opposing all forms of gender-based violence, gender-based stereotyping, oppression, and discrimination based on race, age, language, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

## **We call upon the Member States and the United Nations to:**

Recognize faith communities as integral partners in the protection and promotion of human dignity and human rights for women and girls. Already trusted in communities, faith-based organizations can contribute to challenging

heteropatriarchal attitudes and practices by promoting women's participation at all levels of society.

Facilitate women's and girls' full participation in technology by providing accessible and affordable quality education, scholarships, and training, with emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics education, to ensure decent work, quality jobs and wage equity, and to better address challenges arising from patriarchal norms in the technology sector.

Support women's leadership and political participation through gender-responsive, inclusive approaches. Guarantee women's participation in all aspects of programmes and policies including designing, developing, and implementing innovation and technological change and education in the digital age.

Engage in listening sessions of intergenerational voices and perspectives of women and girls, particularly young women, to encourage young women in careers of science and technology.

Increase funding for digital literacy, education, technology skills development, jobs training, and dependent care assistance for women and girls. Direct financing to communities and countries made most vulnerable by the digital divide.

Improve public services and infrastructure to provide universal internet access, electricity, and functional digital devices and equipment in schools and community centers, particularly in rural and underserved communities which disproportionately impacts women and girls.

Depoliticize women's and girl's health and provide equal access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Educate, promote, and protect the human rights of women and girls relating to privacy, information and online safety and security, safeguarding against gender violence, harassment and discrimination based on race, age, language, sexual orientation, or gender identities.

Support and implement policies and laws that guarantee a life free of violence, exploitation, discrimination and fear for all women and girls, and provide full protections against violence and bullying including cyberbullying, cyberstalking, and online harassment.

Use innovation and technological advancements to raise awareness and address the risk of gender violence by funding programs that educate, train, and provide support to local leaders, and address negative concepts of masculinity which can lead to abuse and violence.

Monitor progress and impact of innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age on women and girls using gender-specific indicators and sex-disaggregated data.

Fully implement key UN agreements, including the Beijing Platform for Action and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Goals 4, 5, 9 and 10, the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women and the UN's Special Procedures mandate on violence against women to ensure discrimination and gender biases are eliminated in local and national laws, policies, and customs.

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (USA)