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Statement submitted by Virtual Activism Incorporated, 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

As an organization that focuses on the intersection between human rights and technology, we believe that technology is part of the process of women's empowerment. Information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the digital revolution offer hopes of social, cultural, and economic empowerment. However, we also believe that technology should not be an end in and of itself, but a means to an end. We must not focus on the technology, but on the problems we want to solve using that technology. It therefore has to be part of a larger strategy of inclusiveness and focus on women and part and parcel of a democratic society.

Technology is a double-edged sword. We may be optimistic about it, but must also understand the concerns it raises. Our reliance on technology is increasing every day and there are yet emerging technologies that have the potential to inflict harm and further alienate women. Technology could be used to encourage women and women's rights, but it could also suppress and oppress them. With current innovations, women are left behind even more, and technology is widening the gap between men and women, between upper and lower classes, between skilled and unskilled workers, especially in less fortunate countries. It is an elitist view to speak of women's empowerment through technology when there are millions of women around the world incapable of having even clean water or a basic education. When we speak of women and technology, we need to make sure that we are addressing more than the elite.

Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

“Decolonizing” technology through cooperation between the global south and global north in terms of both research and innovation in technology through the involvement of beneficiaries and stakeholders who are more knowledgeable about their local needs. This will help show different perspectives and points of views that will benefit the technology itself in the long run.

Involving women in the design and implementation of emerging technologies. We cannot have gender-blind innovation when we have only men innovating and designing technologies. For example, all women could be served using technology in the health sector, but when it comes to women's health, women as designers and beneficiaries should be at the forefront.

Setting standards for transparency. Technology could lead to exploitation in the form of digital labor, trafficking, harassment, and other ills. There need to be transparent strategies that cater to women's issues, in addition to raising awareness among women to work smartly with technology.

Raising awareness among women: technologies are being implemented whether women understand them or not, and whether they know their impact on them or even how to use them. We should be concerned that we are not involved, and should continue to ensure women's participation and shape our own involvement in the process including governance.

Involving women and human rights defenders in setting the ethical standards of technology on the local, micro levels. It has been done internationally, but governments and civil society are urged to make the commitment to have a more localized discussion on those standards.

Involving civil society more because they raise awareness about human rights, women's rights, freedom of speech and privacy issues. Without transparency and accountability, women are better off without technology.

Protecting data, protecting society from mass surveillance, and placing adequate safeguards against government abuse of technologies need to be guaranteed.