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Statement submitted by International Federation of Women Lawyers, 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

Digital revolution has the potential to boost women's economic and social autonomy in (at least) three areas and increase their participation in the workforce. These three areas of the digital revolution characterized by artificial intelligence are big data, cloud computing, and mobile robotics. Digital technology has become critical to our lives. New digital tools can be a source of equitable global economic growth. The 2023 theme harnesses the potential of technology while managing new and emerging risks. It addresses cross-cutting barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing and using technology and ensures that they have equal opportunities to use, design, develop, and influence innovation and technology. It is crucial that everyone, especially women, is encouraged to pursue their goals and take advantage of this chance.

To ensure that the digital transition represents a leapfrog opportunity for women and girls, it is important to create a more inclusive digital environment and scale up efforts to take advantage of this development. The United Nations initiatives are a significant and timely move towards narrowing the gender gap in the digital sphere. A solid evidence basis that illustrates how women are faring in the digital transformation is necessary for the development and monitoring of all policies and initiatives.

The International Federation of Women Lawyers is concerned that despite the advances made in Information Communication Technology (ICT) connectivity over the past ten years, digital disparities still exist, both within nations and between women and men. We observe a tight correlation between educational attainment and pre-existing disparities, and the possibility of new gaps in the future, impeding sustainable growth.

The benefits of Information Communication Technology are largely denied to the underprivileged. Today, there are almost 250 million fewer women online than there are men. About 90% of cutting-edge start-ups seeking venture capital investments today were established by men, indicating a sociocultural gender bias in equity funding. In comparison to men-owned enterprises, women-owned start-ups get 23% less capital and are 30% less likely to have a successful exit, such as being bought out or going public. The use of Information Communication Technology by women's nongovernmental organisations and civil society organizations to advocate for and promote political empowerment is viable, but funding is needed. E-governance regulations must address the gender gap in access to political involvement and government services, particularly for women who live in rural or remote areas or who are otherwise excluded.

The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) urges prompt action to achieve gender equality among internet users by 2024, by dramatically improving women's and girls' education as well as engagement in Information Communication Technology as consumers, content creators, employees, entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders. These skills will advance a greater sense of duty towards the larger community, greater empathy, more effective communication, and a greater willingness to adjust to changing circumstances. Therefore, it is crucial to consider women's perspectives, needs, rights, and leadership in the media and related technology, both within decision-and policymaking bodies and processes and at the ownership level.

There is a growing number of women in the telecommunication/Information Communication Technology field with decision-making power, including in relevant ministries, national regulatory authorities and industry, who could encourage girls to choose a career in the field of telecommunications/Information Communication

Technology and foster the use of Information Communication Technology for the social and economic empowerment of women and girls. By enhancing access to information technology, equipping people with the knowledge and abilities necessary to navigate and succeed in the digital transformation, and enabling employment, entrepreneurship, funding, and leadership in the digital era, policies can play a significant role in fostering a more inclusive digital world. In April 2017, the G20 ministers in charge of the Digital Economy opted to promote the equitable participation of women in the digital economy. This was upon the acknowledgement of both the opportunities provided by digitalization for the economic empowerment of women and the challenges of ensuring that the benefits of digital transformation are being shared by all. As the first step in their actions to help increase the economic empowerment of women in the digital economy, G20 members agreed to “share national practices on efforts to bridge the digital gender divide” (Action 11 in G20 [2017]). Initial findings from this sharing exercise indicate that many G20 nations have government strategies, policies, or plans that target closing the gender gap in digital technology. However, although laws or regulations in many countries contain gender-related considerations in their digital economy policies, few countries have set time-bound goals for women’s participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), entrepreneurship, or decision-making boards.

Recommendations to the Member States and the United Nations system:

The International Federation of Women Lawyers calls on Member States and the United Nations to:

1. Address gaps in policies and regulations that govern Information Communication Technology regarding ethics, privacy, security, and safety and which create significant risks for women and girls. Furthermore, provide the infrastructure which is essential to achieving digital inclusion, and enables universal, sustainable, ubiquitous, and affordable access to ICT for everyone.
2. To increase the ability of girls and women to comprehend and create Information Communication Technology material, programs focusing on gender-sensitive curricula in formal and non-formal education to ensure that everyone is strengthened.
3. Consider how policies and projects distribute resources related to Information Communication Technology. Funding of initiatives aimed at women and girls, universal access policies, tools for Information Communication Technology training and capacity building for women, all demand special consideration. Gender mainstreaming in corresponding national action plans and strategies should take cognisance of the threats posed by those technologies and media.
4. Launch campaigns to further empower women by utilizing current government programs, particularly in underdeveloped and emerging nations. In addition to achieving their main goals, existing government programs, such as social assistance programs, can be adapted to target women’s economic and digital participation. For example, improving these initiatives, by designating women as the recipients of cash transfers to their families or communities, and actively utilizing women’s capabilities in terms of their social and family duties to the advantage of the program’s main goals, will promote women’s economic inclusion and increase program success.
5. Support high-quality online platforms that provide training to female entrepreneurs and facilitate knowledge exchanges with experienced female entrepreneurs.