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Statement submitted by Association for Progressive Communications, 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.



Statement

We live in a world that is dependent on science and technology. The ability of women and girls to shape their future is limited by their marginal participation in shaping how these technologies are used and developed. Unless this situation is reversed, our scientific and technological future will entrench gender disparities rather than help break them down.

The Association for Progressive Communications Women's Rights Programme is a global network of over 150 women from more than 35 countries who support women working for social change and women's empowerment through the use of information and communications technologies. The Association is the world's oldest online network of civil society organizations working on information and communications technologies and social justice. The women's programme promotes gender equality in the design, development, implementation, access to and use of information and communications technologies and in the policy decisions and frameworks that regulate them.

We would like to share three initiatives that we are currently undertaking to this end, and recommendations that come from them.

Take back the tech!: mobilizing the use of technology to end violence against women

"Take back the tech!" is a global campaign with actions that include documenting the violence that women face both online and offline, capacity-building workshops on how to use information and communications technologies for advocacy, as well as how to create a safer online environment and experience and address the way that violence against women changes the way women experience, access, use and are able to benefit from technology and, by the same token, how developments in information and communications technologies have impacted on the way women experience and respond to violence.

From 2009 to 2011, this work was further developed to deepen knowledge and actions around issues of violence against women and information and communications technologies. The results of the "Take back the tech!" project to end violence against women demonstrated the need to use new tools to ascertain and find solutions to the type of violence women face online.

During the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign in 2011, we began mapping cases of violence against women that occurred online or through the use of information and communications technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet. This was done in an online map to build evidence about violence against women that occurred in virtual platforms and environments.

In this ongoing work, the most common cases of technology-related violence against women that we have documented include cyberstalking, sexual harassment, surveillance, privacy violations and the unauthorized use and manipulation of personal information, including images and videos. We found that while these violations are increasing, women and girls who fall victim do not know what to do to stop the abuse, what charges they can report, who they should report to and what help they can get. In many countries, policies, regulations or services that respond to these new forms of violence do not exist or are inadequate. The report "Voices from

digital spaces: technology-related violence against women” elaborates on these issues in great detail.

We consider that there is an urgent need to contribute to creating a culture and environment of communication and technology development that has zero tolerance of violence against women.

Violence is taking place online. Monitoring efforts by Governments in many parts of the world of cases of violence against women often omit this critical and growing form of violence. Without documentation, they remain unrecognized, excluded from or little understood in the concerted efforts to end the persistent reality of violence against women all over the world.

Integration of gender and women’s rights in decision-making in information and communications technologies

The Association for Progressive Communications Women’s Rights Programme has actively participated in both the World Summit on the Information Society and in the annual Internet Governance Forums, key United Nations-led policy deliberation spaces for discussing how the Internet should be governed and how to respond to emerging critical issues that accompany the rapid and increasingly ubiquitous development of information and communications technologies. In both spaces, the presence of women’s rights advocates and representatives from national women’s rights machineries has been limited. This stems largely from the lack of integration of gender and women’s rights issues and perspectives in community, national and regional policy and decision-making processes on matters related to the development of information and communications technologies. As a result, there is a disconnect between policy and legislative measures to facilitate economic, social and political development through information and communications technologies and those that aim to advance the status and rights of women and girls.

Women’s rights to freedom of expression and association must be respected on the Internet, in order to ensure development. From our research and training with women’s human rights defenders and activists, we have found that there is an urgent need to address blocking and filtering from a gender perspective, as blocking and filtering of content related to women’s sexuality have adverse effects on women’s and girls’ rights to participate in cultural life and to fully exercise their citizenship within the evolving information society.

This is especially relevant when current approaches to content regulation in relation to sexuality take a protectionist standpoint on the basis of “harm” caused to either private individuals or public morals. This approach neglects important questions such as how “harm” is measured, using what value system, and how such regulation empowers or further constrains already marginalized sections of society. We should approach Internet regulation with a view to creating the conditions necessary to provide protection and fulfilment of the rights of a diversity of people; towards inclusion and equality.

Governments should work for the development of information and communications technologies policies that are grounded on women’s lives and experiences. This requires support for research and evidence-based policy formulation, which critically includes a gender perspective and analysis.

Governments should also be able to create bodies, mechanisms and processes that directly seek the participation of women in Internet governance at all levels — from community to international — to ensure that women and girls have equal access to critical Internet resources and to the potential development benefits of information and communications technologies, and are equal partners in defining the agenda on information and communications technologies for development.

Small grants to support women's rights work at ground level

In 2010, as part of our work towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality, we provided small grants of up to US\$ 5,000 each to over 60 local, primarily community-based, organizations to implement projects that use information and communications technologies to end violence against women and build their capacity to do so.

These small grants created a unique opportunity for small, primarily community-based, groups, many of whom do not qualify for financial support from larger agencies, to use information and communications technologies to strengthen their work. The grants responded directly to local needs by employing relevant, appropriate and replicable models that use technology to combat violence against women in simple and innovative ways. The results demonstrate that locally owned and designed interventions that mobilize community participation can have far-reaching impacts.

As a result of this project, grantees were able to support women who experience online violence. More organizations took up information and communications technologies as a women's rights issue at a time when technology-related violence is on the increase, contributing to greater representation of women's specific concerns. The Internet and other technology tools facilitate quicker, more direct and immediate responses to survivors of violence. The small grant projects explored using mobile phones, two-way radios, radio and other technologies in their work to support survivors and hold Governments and other actors accountable to their commitments. Organizations were also able to network and document violations. A number of grantees, particularly those working with marginalized communities, are now using the Internet and other technology tools to mobilize and organize around specific issues.

These experiences have demonstrated the immense potential and value of small grants in providing concrete support for women and girls at ground and community levels in accessing, using and defining information and communications technologies for the advancement of their rights, and for the transformation of the social, political and cultural spaces that they occupy.

Governments should support and provide for the establishment and maintenance of grants and funding that are accessible to community-level organizations and initiatives that can build women's capacity to access and use information and communications technologies in the advancement of their rights.