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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 World Association for Christian Communication, 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

Introduction

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been the road map for the improvement of gender equality in and through the media and information and communications technology, both internationally and at national level. The imperative to advance gender equality in these sectors was indicated in Section J and its two strategic objectives:

- Strategic objective J:1. Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication.
- Strategic objective J:2. Promote a balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women in the media.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action laid the foundations for the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5: gender equality, whose attainment requires gender equality in and through the media and information and communications technology to be improved.

Where are we now?

The global media landscape has evolved dramatically in the more than 20-year period since the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), when media were recognized as critical for the advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men. Section J of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action underlined several issues, among them, gender bias in media organizations, degrading and pornographic media images of women, and the unexploited potential of information technology for women's progress. At the time, less than 1 per cent of the world's population was online, while now, approximately 50 per cent have access to the Internet. Of these, three quarters are active on social media platforms that have emerged since the beginning of the millennium. Seven out of 10 people today own a cell phone capable of transmitting instant messages or connecting to the Internet. Online media content reproduces the exclusion and ghettoization of women – characteristic of traditional media forms – within the media product and in the comments and responses of new interactive audiences. While the number of women working in media and communications has increased more broadly, their presence in top management remains negligible. For instance, only six of the 100 largest international media corporations in the world had female chief Executive Officers in 2017.

Evidence shows that recommendations included in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Section J, have been widely disregarded by governments, media, and telecommunications companies. New industry players, such as social media platforms, have also failed to take responsibility for implementing effective strategies that protect women from online violence.

The Global Media Monitoring Project, coordinated by the World Association for Christian Communication, shows that in 2015, women constituted only 24 per cent of news sources globally – up from 17 per cent in 1995, a snail's pace rate of change towards equality. Stereotypes still abound in media, and especially in advertising, with governments leaving the watchdog role to scholars and activists.

An estimated 4.4 billion people – mostly poor, female, rural, and living in developing countries – have no access to the Internet. According to the International Telecommunication Union, internet penetration rates are higher for men than for women in all regions of the world, and the global Internet user gender gap grew from 11 per cent in 2013 to 12 per cent in 2016. Significantly fewer women are connected to the Internet than men (the gap is 200 million).

Cyber violence against women and girls is a global problem. The Report on Cyber Violence, published by the Broadband Commission in 2015, reveals that almost three quarters of women online have been exposed to some form of cyber violence and urges governments and industry to work harder and more effectively together to better protect the growing number of women and girls who are victims of online threats and harassment.

Violence against women journalists, online and offline, has increased dramatically in both conflict and non-conflict countries. Offline, women journalists continue to face disproportionate risks of femicide, physical, psychological, and sexual violence. This violence often happens with the consent of the States, which results in a cycle of impunity, and in contexts where news media companies are not ensuring safe working conditions for women journalists.

There is no institutional commitment from universities to adopt gender mainstreaming in the curricula of communication and journalism schools, and most governments are not documenting gender inequalities in media and information communication and technology.

The problems are linked to non-compliance by States of United Nations human rights treaties to ensure basic human rights of all women and non-compliance of media companies to laws and regulations enacted at global, national, and industry levels.

While the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action lists actions that could achieve gender equality, there is no single formal policy on gender and communication. This is largely due to the power of the media and telecommunications sectors, which have been opposed to regulation that attempts to protect the rights of citizens to communicate. Thanks to the work done by academics, women's media networks, and activists the vision of Section J has remained alive.

In conclusion, while not all the current dimensions of the women and media experience were reflected in the analysis contained in Section J, the transformations and corresponding and emerging gender issues of the last two decades make it important to take stock and suggest a way forward if intervention strategies on media and information and communication technologies are to be relevant.

Recommendations

Using the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as the road map, it is urgent to challenge the media and information communication technology sectors. It also is important to strengthen gender equality within these sectors by providing directions for various stakeholders to respond to urgent needs, such as: research to inform policy; promote regulatory and self-regulatory mechanisms at national, regional and international levels; implement frameworks for algorithmic transparency, incorporating methods, such as third party audits; promote media and digital literacy programmes, with a gender component that specifically focuses on building the information and media literacy of women and girls; encourage efforts by women's organizations in using digital media and online spaces to amplify their stories; ensure safe conditions for women, journalists, and professionals in media and telecommunications corporations and organizations; and tackle online and offline gender-based harassment and violence, as well as immunity from the law.

The Global Alliance on Media and Gender urges the Commission on the Status of Women to call on Member States and media and information communication technology organizations, in particular, to assume their tasks to achieve gender equality in and through these sectors.