



## **Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General  
6 December 2020

Original: English

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Sixty-fifth session**

15–26 March 2021

**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 Carter Center, Inc., The, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### Improving Women's Right to Access Information

Evidence shows that our communities are more secure, peaceful and prosperous when women have equal rights and opportunities. But for women to fully benefit, they need equitable access to information. The right of access to information is a fundamental right, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action defined key areas of priority for governments to ensure gender equality, and underscores in Article 35 the role that information plays in the advancement and empowerment of women. Additionally, core elements of the right to access to information are further emphasized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals – the world's shared blueprint for peace and prosperity.

Access to information is critical for the exercise of civil, political, social and economic rights and is instrumental in improving governance, transparency, and accountability. A genuine right of access to information is particularly important for women, as it allows for more effective decision-making regarding education, land ownership, business opportunities, health, and the promotion and protection of other rights. It enables women to participate in public life, have meaningful voice, and hold governments and service providers accountable. Nonetheless, reality is a stark reminder of the gap between aspiration and practice, as the right of access to information remains elusive for half of the world's population – women. Despite the over 127 countries with access to information laws, the benefits have not reached many women due to myriad legal, institutional, and structural/cultural factors that prevent the exercise of this right.

Previously, little attention had been paid to gender-based information asymmetries and its causes and impacts. Since 1999, The Carter Center has served as an international leader in advancing the right of access to information. Through this work, the Center noted that too often women were not able to exercise their right to information with the same facility, ease, and rate of success as men. The Carter Center became the first organization to systematically focus on the intersection of information and gender and has been working with government and civil society partners to address the obstacles leading to this inequity. In February 2018, The Carter Center convened 100 persons representing government and civil society leaders, experts, and practitioners from the fields of human rights, gender, transparency, and accountability to undertake a critical examination of the gendered inequities facing women in the right of access to information. This was the first such gathering and culminated in the development of The Atlanta Declaration for the Advancement of Women's Right of Access to Information.

Despite progress on advancing access to information, critical obstacles for women still remain. Rooted traditional cultural mores, information flows that actively exclude women, illiteracy, lack of awareness of the right or how to exercise it, overwhelming household responsibilities, and immobility all continue to play a role in creating gender asymmetries in access to information. Further, women's rights organizations often are not engaged whilst groups promoting the right to information are not including gender-based issues. This lack of attention towards such a key intersectionality highlights the need for a concerted effort to raise awareness and take concrete steps towards a world where access to information is universally recognized as a vital tool for all people – including women.

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has underscored the urgent need to deliver on women's access to information. The pandemic has had devastating consequences for

women, exacerbating pre-existing inequities in health, economics, security, and education. A free flow of information from national and local governments to women will be critical for a recovery that includes and emphasizes women, enabling them to access the resources and services urgently needed for their protection and recovery. Without access to critical information, women risk being excluded from participating in decisions around the response to COVID-19 and the rebuilding of their communities. Local governments are more important than ever, and so is the need to ensure that they are providing meaningful access to information, especially to women in their communities.

In light of this context, The Carter Center is launching the Inform Women, Transform Lives campaign with the realization of the urgent need to deliver on the right to access information for women around the world. Working with an initial cohort of 10+ cities, the campaign aims increase awareness on women's right to information, support cities in providing information to women, and demonstrate the transformative impact that information has women, their families, and the wider community.

### **Recommendations**

We urge the international community, Member States, United Nations agencies and Civil Society Organizations to adopt a holistic approach to women's right to information and join our efforts to:

Underscore the pivotal importance of women's access to information for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, their economic empowerment and the promotion and protection of their human rights. The Sustainable Development Goals provide an opportunity to demonstrate the value of and unlock the access to information for women, and correspondingly, without information reaching women, the Agenda 2030 will not be achieved.

Foster an enabling environment that supports women's use of such information, leading to action. Women's ability to exercise their right of access to information alone is a critical but insufficient step to transforming their lives. Structural and cultural obstacles – such as women's double burden of paid and nonpaid work and family care, fear, and violence against women – undermine women's ability to exercise fully the right of access to information.

Make the right of access to information for women explicit within existing international and regional human rights instruments, such as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Generation Equality outcome document, and in the strategic planning and work of intergovernmental agencies and platforms.

Ensure legal and policy frameworks sufficiently enable women to access information. Many existing access to information laws have not been developed with gender sensitivity, nor reviewed to ensure that the statutory provisions and its implementation do not adversely impact women.

Ensure that access-to-information legal frameworks are implemented in ways that support women's ability to fully exercise the right, including by developing, identifying, and proactively disclosing information meaningful for women; placing information in spaces accessible to all women and through modes and means (language, formats, presentation, simplified language) that allow women, particularly marginalized women, to access and use the information; employing solutions to overcome structural obstacles that hinder women's exercise of the right; disaggregating information related to requesters by sex; and engaging oversight bodies to promote women's right of access to information and report on progress.

With reference to a post-COVID context, increasing urbanization, and the importance of information overwhelmingly held at a local level, underscore the need to support and engage municipal governments in more effectively reaching women with meaningful information.

Secure critical resources to support efforts to advance women's right of access to information, including training for national and local government/public servants and for civil society; research; and pilot projects.

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