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Commission on the Status of Women

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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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Interactive dialogue among youth representatives on the priority theme “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”

Chair’s summary

1. On 13 March 2023, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue on the priority theme “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”, to facilitate exchanges among youth representatives from delegations of Member States. Participants exchanged views, experiences and insights, with an emphasis on the unequal access to digital technologies. The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Chinguundari Navaan-Yunden (Mongolia), made an introductory statement and chaired the dialogue.

2. The following speakers made opening remarks: Senior Test Developer at Levi9 Technology Services, Milica Knežević; the Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Kamara Yokie Innovation Center, Hawa Yokie; systems engineer and lawyer, and Co-Founder and National Director of Mujeres TICs Bolivia, Alison Berbetty Omiste; activist and consultant for the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, Oscar Fitzpatrick; and the Founder of Baithak – Challenging Taboos, Aisha Mehmood. Of the 35 speakers from Member States and one observer, 25 were youth representatives, and of the seven speakers from civil society organizations, six were youth representatives. The Chair of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the Special Adviser to the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth also took part in the dialogue.



Context

3. Digital and technological innovations have the potential to have a significant impact on today's society, contributing to the improvement of social, economic and political outcomes. In 2022, 63 per cent of women across the globe were using the Internet compared with 69 per cent of men, a notable gender gap, indicating that more men have access to technologies and digital innovations than women. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further highlighted this disparity and amplified the unequal pace of digital transformation, with women and girls being disproportionately affected. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize efforts that promote equal access to and participation in global digital systems, to ensure that women and girls are not left behind in the digital age.

Bridging the knowledge and gender gap

4. Speakers highlighted the importance of access to technological devices, the Internet and data to ensure the meaningful participation of all women and girls in today's digital age. They stressed the need for national policies to be focused on prioritizing training in information and communications technology, including programming courses and online learning platforms, to ensure that everyone was included in digital transformations. Participants emphasized the need to bridge the rural-urban divide through increased funding of technological infrastructure in order to create new opportunities for young people to have access to education, training and job opportunities in the digital economy.

5. Participants noted that young women and girls were not just technology users, but also possessed knowledge and expertise that could contribute to the technology-driven world. They called for collaboration among Governments, civil society, development partners, the private sector and the youth community, which was critical to achieving gender equality through technology. Speakers called for existing initiatives and projects to be reformed to effectively close the gender gap and promote equal access to technology, opportunities and equal pay for work of equal value. Participants argued that human rights and inclusion should be central to national policies and collective efforts, and stressed the importance of tackling youth unemployment, in particular in rural areas.

6. Speakers voiced their concern about sexual and gender-based violence against young women and girls, which was further exacerbated by technology, leaving young women, girls, young persons living with disabilities and other youth in diverse conditions and situations particularly vulnerable to online crimes. They emphasized the need for greater security measures, which included human rights-based approaches to technology development, and legal infrastructures to effectively address online gender-based violence. In addition, participants highlighted the need to develop mental health programmes that specifically addressed the impact of gender-based violence that occurred through or was amplified by the use of technology on the self-esteem and body confidence of young women and girls.

7. Participants noted that empowering women and girls through digital literacy was important to support them in making informed decisions about their health, well-being and access to reproductive health services and to address the barriers that prevented access to critical health information.

8. Speakers shared that, despite progress, women and girls remained underrepresented in the fields of science and technology. They argued that, to disrupt male-dominated fields and professions, it was crucial to make targeted efforts towards achieving gender equality, which included conducting awareness campaigns to

increase interest in and promote equal opportunities in and access to professions in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

9. Speakers highlighted that it was critical for Governments to recognize the vulnerability of young people in the online space and the disproportionate enforcement of laws, which allowed offenders to exploit such vulnerability. They emphasized the importance of addressing the spread of misinformation and disinformation online, prioritizing education and promoting media literacy among young people in order to challenge harmful beliefs and stereotypes online. Speakers called for the reform of systems that perpetuated sexual harassment, digital gender-based violence, discrimination and marginalization and for holding perpetrators accountable.

The way forward

10. Participants argued that, in order to achieve gender equality, it was imperative to ensure that all women and girls had improved access to the Internet and digital technologies. This required an intersectional approach that prioritized the perspectives and needs of those who faced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and experienced marginalization.

11. Speakers expressed their desire to collaborate with Governments, civil society actors and women's and youth movements to co-design digital education programmes through which women and girls in diverse situations and conditions were empowered to tackle digital illiteracy and improve economic conditions. They stressed the need to address and dismantle harmful gender stereotypes in order to increase women's and girls' participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

12. Participants recommended strengthening digital safeguards and the right to privacy, safety and equality both online and offline through gender-responsive policies and safety mechanisms. They argued that it was the collective responsibility of Governments, civil society organizations, the private sector and youth to ensure that all women and girls were empowered and that their rights were upheld worldwide.

13. Participants emphasized the need to recognize that youth-led solutions already existed and underlined the imperative to ensure that youth voices were being heard. They called for financial support for youth-led initiatives to ensure their sustainability and success. Speakers suggested that youth delegates from all countries be included and involved in negotiations and decision-making processes within their respective countries.
