Economic and Social Council

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"

Statement submitted by Peace Track Initiative, 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.

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Statement

The Peace Track Initiative is submitting this statement with the aim to expose digital violence against Yemeni women human rights defenders, peacebuilders, and political leaders, as well as shed light on internet limited accessibility in Yemen and its disproportionate impact on women. Yemeni women inside and outside the country have been targeted by digital violence directly threatening women's security, preventing them from participating in the public sphere and restricting their rights to equal citizenship and work.

The Peace Track Initiative documented cases of digital violence against women that included targeted smear campaigns, increased censorship, hacking, phishing, and deep fake video altering. The smear campaigns used hate speech, false accusations, misinformation, targeted trolling, and digging up posts that women shared in the past and taking them out of context, as a way to digitally assassinate the women's characters.

The Women Solidarity Network issued a statement in solidarity with Dr Nadia Al-Sakkaf, after she was targeted by a smear campaign with hate and racist rhetoric to cultivate suspicion in her national positions. This came after her participation in leading the campaign organized by the feminist movement "No Women No Government" to protest against the new formation of the legitimate government, which completely excluded women, making it the first government in twenty years without women. Dr. Nadia Al-Sakkaf, in her capacity as deputy of the National Authority for Monitoring the Implementation of the Outcomes of the Dialogue, objected to the formation of the government without the participation of women, through a video she posted on her personal page on Twitter. Among those who attacked her were journalists that are known to be affiliated to state officials and political parties.

Additionally, the Peace Track Initiative documented the case of a smear campaign against Dr Olfat Al-Dubai, a member of the Consultation and Reconciliation Commission, for her role in supporting the campaign "My Passport Without Guardianship" for lifting the unlawful conditions on issuing passports for women. This was manifested in a fierce defamation campaign inciting conservative religious hate speech.

As a result of hacking and phishing, stolen information including photos and videos of women were used as blackmail to deter them from their work in civil society space. The Peace Track Initiative documented a case of Enough for Humanitarian Protection, a non-profit organization, providing shelter services for women survivors of violence in Mareb. A series of threats against the women leading the organization took place including the storming of Dar Al-Aman shelter run by them. The incident was also documented by the National Commission to Investigate Alleged Violations to Human Rights in their tenth report which concluded that the party responsible is the police department in Marib Governorate. The threats escalated after information of the women leading the organization was stolen from a phone and used to blackmail them. In a tribal and conservative governorate such as Mareb, leaking these photos is a social suicide that may lead to honour crimes.

A concerning shortcoming in the protection of Yemeni women arises from international digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter as their protection policies fail to understand the Yemeni context and are unable to censor and block hate speech that targets women on their platforms. The Peace Track Initiative documented the creation of fake accounts, videos, and audio messages spreading hate speech based on false information questioning women's morality to incite the society

to prevent them from working in international organizations and civil society organizations.

Moreover, increased restrictions on internet access were reported. The January 2022 letter from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the UN Security Council indicated that the Houthis group has been using telecommunication tools to monitor and interdict traffic, censor content, carry out internet shutdowns, ban social media sites and personal messaging services, monitor private communication of opponents and block domains. This monopoly over the telecommunications sector has been particularly instrumentalized by the group to threaten Yemeni women political leaders and activists. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed a migration of peace talks to online platforms including zoom. The Peace Track Initiative documented cases of restricting women under Houthi controlled areas from participation in online meetings including participation in high level online meetings including Track II diplomatic peace consultations, the Humanitarian Pledging Conference, and UN Human Rights Council.

In conclusion, we urge the Commission on the Status of Women to consider the following recommendations in order to support Yemeni women's digital rights:

- Demand that the Yemeni State strengthen the infrastructure of internet in Yemen, ensuring taking steps to improve accessibility for women, as well as urge the state to work on improving women's access to justice and taking serious actions to prevent and protect women from digital violence, ensuring that a cybercrime and digital law is developed, and that the judiciary system has gender and digital analysis experts.

- Demand that the international social media platforms provide stronger protection especially to women including by improving their reporting mechanisms through partnering and consulting with Yemeni women-led civil society.

- Support the review and improvement of Yemen's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security to ensure it considers the digital rights of Yemeni women and their protection from online smear and hate campaigns as an area of focus and a necessary condition to women's safe and meaningful participation in Yemen's peace and political process.

- Increase efforts to ensure that women in Yemen, in particular those concerned by marginalization factors like rural women and those living in Houthi controlled areas, have access to essential services like safe and private internet connectivity.

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