



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-seventh session

6–17 March 2023

**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 Ilitha Labantu, 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

Women, especially older women, have been victims of exclusion from science and technology. Throughout history, many cultures have been hostile to the participation of women in the study and development of these two areas of human knowledge.

A project of Ilitha Labantu, Isisele Senyathi, “Isisele Senyathi” a Xhosa idiom meaning a reservoir of knowledge or a mine of information, a hub for African women’s history, will restore women’s memories and highlight women’s indigenous knowledge systems as part of women’s history and philosophy, which sought to determine specific information and communications technology needs for older women, and through the process of learning how to use specific information and communications technology tools, these women shared their life histories. Through such a process the recovery of historical memory was experienced.

For the last thirty-three years since our establishment, Ilitha Labantu has served as a historical hub for women’s stories dedicated to ordinary women. As an organisation we have been aiming at lifting the voices, faces and victories of women, telling stories of the leaders, visionaries and change makers who made the history of today.

As an organisation, we know that working with, and listening to survivors, is the cornerstone of our work, that has helped us to respond to their complex needs and issues. Underpinning Ilitha Labantu’s survivor-centred approach is the evidence-based understanding of how experiences of sexual violence, abuse and inequality affects women and girls, and is prevented; and how closing the gender digital divide and enhancing women and girls access to empowerment through digital skills with Sustainable Development Goal 5 at the core, is relevant.

The risks of violence against women and girls that existed in the thirty-three years of history of Ilitha Labantu are still very present. The pace of societal and technological change however means that new and evolving forms of crimes against women and girls are continuously emerging. As an organisation, we believe in eliminating the systemic gender inequality that lies at the root of violence against women and girls. We also believe in the need to be bold in our intervention methods, of collecting and collating women and girl’s history through the use of technology.

One, the major aim this project tried to achieve was to empower the participation of women to reflect on their individual role, played throughout their own life, from childhood to maturity, and to communicate these reflections with other people to keep women’s voices alive by sharing and revealing the untold and unheard stories of survival and resilience of women who have shaped the African experience. Second, to make an intellectual contribution to the historiography of African women’s struggle by generating knowledge and showcasing women’s indigenous knowledge system as part of women’s history and philosophy. Third, to ensure the role of African women as history makers and agents of change is historically accurate and equitable. Fourth, to bring together anyone interested in African women’s history and how women’s contributions to society is fully recognised, valued and celebrated.

All this was made possible through a series of workshops and annual conferences in which women were exposed to the use of information and communications technology tools, thus counteracting their feeling of incapacity in handling the machine and using information and communications technology tools. This feeling of incapacity came about after years of believing that they are technologically ignorant thus remaining estranged to the rapid advance of information technology and communication.

Ilitha Labantu hold the idea that women are guardians of history and heritage, keepers of knowledge and know-how, and stewards of tradition. The organisation's side events themes for the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, seeks to restore women's memories and highlight women's indigenous knowledge system as part of women's history and philosophy, to discover the hidden herstories and untold stories of African women, from politics, domestic workers, factory workers, union members to the earliest women graduates, and share this information with a wider audience.

Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age is paramount to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. As a local-based organisation whose interventions and services provided to women and girls in the township are global, we have a history of evidence-based understanding and archives of stories of women and girls in the townships and rural areas, of their challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and empowerment.

Ilitha Labantu has since secured important reforms aimed at realizing the promise of genuine equality and the universality of fundamental human rights norms by giving substantive voice to the cultural rights of African women, which has been an important feature of the discourse of Ilitha Labantu and has led to significant advances in recognizing the intersectionality of the forms of oppression experienced by African women, the centrality of African women's action in exercising their cultural rights, and the dangers of essentialized conceptions of the lived experiences of women.

As an organisation, we believe that now is the moment to accelerate the development, application, preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge of African women through the use of technology, by sharing and connecting people with history in meaningful ways- for today and for tomorrow, because history matters.

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