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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Institute for International Women’s Rights – Manitoba, 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

The Institute for International Women's Rights - Manitoba acknowledges that innovation and technical change are instrumental to the development and achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women, girls and gender diverse people. Though new technologies are constantly emerging, digital literacy on a global scale continues to be thwarted by inequitable access to technology. Further, access to digital technology is a democratic right, wherein individuals and groups can access and share information, participate in civic engagement and expression, and connect with others. Digital technology is also a crucial link for education, especially in rural and remote areas. However, access to digital technology and digital literacy is barred by a gender divide, in which women, girls and gender diverse people are disadvantaged by fewer opportunities to educate themselves and engage in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We must build, support, and create platforms that allow women, girls, and gender diverse people to receive equitable access to digital technology, which is an essential component to overcoming gender inequality. We must create spaces that provide safe and affordable access to digital literacy and engage with stakeholders that empower women, girls and gender diverse people's full participation in the digital economy. Through systems of free, prior, and informed consent and self-determination, our work must support women, girls, and gender diverse people to not only have equitable access to technology and digital literacy, but to amplify their voices and empower them to drive change. Finally, the digital inequity experienced by Indigenous peoples is mostly due to the long legacy of colonial practices and policies that fail to recognize and respect Indigenous rights. It is essential to understand that due to the wide-reach and influence technology has on our lives, digital inequity has the ability to increase the existing socio-economic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that persists in every sector from housing, to education, to child welfare, to economic and food security, and more. Technology weaves through nearly every aspect of our lives. Indigenous peoples must have influence over the design and future of technology and must be at the decision-making table. To date, they have been largely excluded, this has prevented them from equitably engaging with technology or from participating in the technology sector.

Recommendations

Equip and train women, girls, and gender diverse people with the skills needed to participate and thrive in the digital transformation and to curb socio-cultural norms that discriminate against women and girls questioning their ability to perform science, technology, engineering and mathematics and information and communications technology-related jobs.

Create an awareness campaign that will convey the message that female leadership and presence is as "normal" as male leadership and presence in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and information and communications technology-related jobs and digital transformation.

Foster private-public partnerships, including between academia and the private sector, to identify and develop the skills that are demanded by the labor market in the digital era, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills.

Increase online safety for the full participation of women, girls, and gender diverse people in the digital economy, by prohibiting gender-based violence in digital spaces and protecting their rights to participate in an environment free from violence.

Promote diversity in entrepreneurship for girls, women and gender diverse people providing them with the skills, financial support and network to develop

innovative ideas which can represent an important step towards greater gender equity and justice.

Collect gender-disaggregated data to inform digital policy. This will allow policy makers to assess the situation and develop appropriate, evidence-based responses and policies. It is vital to tailor any analysis to the local context, including by analyzing local data. This can be done by involving national or local gender experts, consulting civil society organizations – especially women’s organizations – making use of national research, and triangulating information.

Ensure digital equity to all Indigenous peoples. Digital equity is defined as a state in which every Indigenous person, community and Nation is fully equipped to access and effectively use technology to contribute, thrive, and succeed in today’s digital society while preserving self-determination. Institute for International Women’s Rights - Manitoba knows that digital equity is more than just access to computers and the internet, it is about influence over the trajectory of technology and its impacts on society. Digital equity is a prerequisite for innovation, self-governance, entrepreneurship, education, economic and cultural wellbeing, and nearly all aspects of rights implementation in the digital age.
