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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 International Council of Women, 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 International Council of Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, has been committed to advancing women's equal rights and empowerment since its establishment in 1888. The International Council of Women firmly believes that the attainment of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls are indispensable keys to facilitating progress toward sustainable global development.

The International Council of Women welcomes the priority theme of the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls". It also welcomes the review theme "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls" (Agreed Conclusions of the 62nd Session). Both themes are crucial and indispensable for attaining 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The International Council of Women strongly believes that innovation, technology and education are closely inter-linked and, therefore, much emphasis should also be put on education. As for the field of innovation and technology, this is one where role models are especially important. However, women continue to be under-represented in the technological field which continues to be dominated by men. Such stereotypes have a very real impact: they can lower girls' performance and interest in innovation and technology and they can hinder women's recruitment and career progression in these disciplines. It is, therefore, of extreme importance to conduct research at national, regional and global levels in order to determine and understand the underlying factors of the current gender gap in innovation, technology and education, as well as devise strategies and actions that would lead to gender equality and to the empowerment of women and girls.

Over the last few decades, new technologies and innovations have revolutionized the way we live, creating more and more possibilities for accessing and exchanging information, for connecting with other people around the globe, and for developing businesses. At their most basic, these technologies hold the capacity to provide universal access to a wealth of information, resources and means of communication. However, patterns of innovation and new technologies in use around the world show a different reality. The existence of a "digital divide" between genders as well as among and within societies demonstrates that, without measures to ensure universal access to information and communication technology, even these fundamentally equalizing tools can perpetuate inequality.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Engineering Report (2021) indicates the decline in enrolment of girls in the natural sciences and engineering courses in the educational systems of several countries as well as the shortage of women engineers in universities. Furthermore, according to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2021), 244 million children and youth (60 per cent girls) between the ages of 6 and 18, worldwide, were out of school. Unfortunately, the proportion of illiterate women has not changed significantly over the last twenty years: women still represent some two thirds of the world's almost 800 million illiterate people!

With such data, and as the world economy becomes increasingly knowledge-driven, the future prosperity and well-being of all countries will depend greatly on having an educated workforce able to access and use existing technologies and to innovate new applications. Women obviously represent an important pool of talent, which should be harnessed to make contributions to innovation and technological progress. We all know that education and appropriate training are gateways to the

empowerment of women and girls. Indeed, education is a fundamental human right and a force for equity and equality. It is also a development multiplier and provides individuals and societies with the tools to respond to change and innovation, and to make the most of such response.

In order therefore to develop the skills required, women and girls need to have full access to the desired education in technology and innovation at all levels, including the use of modern tools such as information and communication technology, as noted.

The International Council of Women and its affiliate members worldwide strongly believe that there are no immovable barriers to gender equality in innovation and technology. Therefore, recognizing the fact that equal access to education not only empowers women and girls, particularly in the context of global economic and technological changes, but also promotes development and gender equality, the International Council of Women calls on:

- Governments, international organisations and the media to counter negative gender-stereotypes related to women in scientific and technological fields and careers by promoting, and integrating, positive female role models in schools, the job market, the public arena and the media, and by increasing digital literacy of women through relevant, quality, formal and non-formal technical and vocational training in such gender-sensitive frameworks and capacity development programs which are critical for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls;
- Stakeholders to adapt technological knowledge and innovation to the realities and needs of women in order to further the eradication of poverty, and to promote economic, social, environmental and cultural development; this whilst recognizing the crucial contributions of women in all aspects of life, including the indigenous and traditional knowledge of rural women;
- Educational planners and policy makers to rigorously promote education in mathematics, science, innovation and technology for girls and women;
- Governments and international organizations to integrate gender into the analysis of scientific research and technological innovation and development, and to take appropriate measures to support the recruitment, retention and advancement of women and girls in innovation and technology through transparent criteria leading to decent work.

The International Council of Women believes that it is crucial for all stakeholders to cooperate and work together in closing gender divides in digital skills, technology and innovation through a fundamental key, which is education! The International Council of Women also recognises the significant contribution of the Action Equality on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality in building more equal and inclusive digital societies through multi-stakeholder partnerships. We call for international cooperation to strengthen existing systems, to build new networks, and to share good practices for increasing access and participation of women and girls in innovation, technological change and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.