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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 Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact and International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, non-governmental organizations 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

This written statement is respectfully submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women in response to 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.

This submission outlines the main challenges and opportunities (in relation to the priority theme) facing Indigenous women and girls, who make up roughly 2.5 per cent of the global population. Indigenous women are some of the most poor, marginalised groups, and disproportionately face intersectional discrimination and multiple expressions of violence. It is urgent to challenge and end harassment and violence, discriminatory attitudes and stereotyping based on gender, ethnicity, and Indigenous identity – trends that persist online and offline and are entrenched obstacles to Indigenous women's equality.

Main challenges for Indigenous women in relation to innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age include: lack of access to the digital space, lack of online literacy, lack of disaggregated data, lack of data sovereignty, online harassment leading to off-line violence. All of which are described and mentioned in the report of the UN Special Rapporteur of Indigenous Peoples to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/51/28).

Lack of access to the digital space and lack of online literacy

Disaggregated data on Indigenous women's access to digital spaces, mobile ownership, access to broadband and mobile internet and digital literacy remain lacking. Particularly, identifying data on those populations living in rural settings remain challenging. According to the "Sustainable Development Goals Report" 95 per cent of the world's population is covered by mobile-broadband network, but coverage does not equate to quality access.

Global System for Mobile Association's "Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022" shows that 3.2 billion people in low and middle-income countries now primarily access the Internet via their mobile phones, and while the gender gap in mobile ownership (7 per cent fewer women than men), and mobile internet use (16 per cent fewer women than men), has tended to close in the last five years, their data from 2021 shows a reversal of this progress. This translates into 264 million fewer women than men using mobile internet in 2021.

Once women start to overcome this gap and gain access to a mobile phone and mobile internet, the top barriers are lack of digital literacy, digital skills, affordability, and threats related to safety and security for women in digital spaces.

This aligns with the persistent challenges faced by Indigenous women, as identified through the Indigenous Navigator's data and implementation across 11 countries. In its 2020 report "Indigenous Women's Realities: Insights from the Indigenous Navigator" these challenges include multiple intersecting forms of discrimination; unequal pay; violence and harassment, both within and outside their communities and in the digital world; limited access to health services; lack of recognition of their land rights; and limited participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges and slowing the rate at which women across lower-middle-income countries are adopting mobile internet. Indigenous women, facing intersectional barriers, have been particularly affected.

The pandemic has further contributed to crises of affordability, access to finance, to education and to digital services as sanitary measures have triggered duty

bearers to replace physical provision of services with digital, and economic impacts have critically affected Indigenous women.

Lack of disaggregated data

Poor data collection renders indigenous women virtually invisible in official statistics, constraining efforts to advance gender and ethnic equality in public policies. The lack of disaggregated, validated data on Indigenous women hampers research and impedes the design of policies and programmes that address the overlapping and interdependent forms of discrimination they face. Too often this gap leads to indigenous women's perspectives being overlooked, ignored and substituted by the views of other constituencies. The system-wide action plan for ensuring a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples specifically calls on the United Nations system and Member States to address this issue. As noted in The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022, data disaggregation, is crucial in identifying the challenges faced by Indigenous women and in understanding who are being pushed further behind. While the use of innovative approaches, such as mobile phone surveys and digital services are crucial tools in addressing our common agenda, they cannot be implemented without first ensuring they do not exclude or harm the most vulnerable groups.

Online harassment

Indigenous women suffer gendered impacts as smear campaigns may target them by spreading rumours that they are dishonourable women of poor reputation who violate indigenous traditions by engaging in public participation and advocacy on community concerns. The aim of such defamation is to disempower and alienate women from their families and communities. Digital smear campaigns are also seen orchestrated by States or military forces often leading to offline violence, as Indigenous women for example in the Philippines have experienced more and more often over the recent years.

Lack of data sovereignty

Lack of data sovereignty is closely linked to the lack of legal protection for scientific and technical knowledge of Indigenous women that is granted to other forms of intellectual property in much of the world. In some cases, western scientists have studied indigenous knowledge of plants and appropriated that knowledge without recognition or remuneration for the Indigenous owners. That misappropriation of knowledge has led to distrust among Indigenous Peoples, who may be reluctant to share knowledge as they lack intellectual property protection. Furthermore, intellectual property protection does not take into account the collective dimension of indigenous knowledge or the fact that the knowledge may be sensitive and not to be shared publicly. In the absence of legal recognition, indigenous knowledge is often considered to be in the public domain to be utilized, commodified, commercialized, exploited and benefited from through appropriation, reproduction and imitation, without the free prior and informed consent of the Indigenous Peoples concerned.

Indigenous women and girls, however, should not only be seen as victims. In reality, they are active change agents in society and champions of sustainability, standing at the forefront of promoting Indigenous Peoples' rights and women's rights, as well as playing an essential role in safeguarding and passing along Indigenous knowledge, tradition, culture and language - both online and offline despite the barriers they face. Once they have gained access to the digital space, and have become literate how to use it safely, several examples show how the digital space has been used by Indigenous Women for sharing important information, teaching, passing on

Indigenous scientific knowledge, reporting their realities (which are not covered by mainstream media), campaigning for their rights to be respected, connecting to the markets, and make work processes more effective. Bottom line, the internet and technology have paved the way for Indigenous women to actively participate in their own process of empowerment.

Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs recommends Member States to:

1. Ensure conditions that guarantee equitable and safe access to the digital space for all -particularly Indigenous women.

2. The development and implementation of rights-based, community-led tools to support Indigenous women in claiming their rights and overcoming barriers such as the digital divide, lack of digital inclusion, and issues related to digital literacy, including Indigenous-led initiatives such as the Indigenous Navigator, are critical.

3. To address limited disaggregated data on the mobile gender gap and other issues facing Indigenous women, national statistics offices, civil society and duty bearers should align to disaggregate, validate and publish data, including indicators on the impacts of local contexts and how barriers and needs vary among different groups of Indigenous Women. The collection, analysis and tracking of gender-disaggregated data related to digital access, particularly for Indigenous women, must be prioritised, to address the persistent challenge of Indigenous Peoples' situation remaining statistically invisible.

4. Ensure online and offline safety and security of Indigenous women and ensure prompt investigation and punishment for those committing online and offline harassment and violence against them.

5. Respect the data sovereignty of Indigenous women.

6. Collaborate and contribute to digital frameworks and other tools (such and the Indigenous Navigator) in order to strengthen community-based monitoring of the realities of Indigenous women and honour global commitments made under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. Digital skills training programmes must ensure provision of contextually appropriate culturally appropriate resources and tools to enhance digital literacy and resilience in regard to digital threats faced by Indigenous women.

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