



## Economic and Social Council

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### 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 Let’s Breakthrough, MenEngage Global Alliance, and Sonke Gender Justice Network, 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.



## Statement

We, MenEngage Alliance, in partnership with Let's Breakthrough and Sonke Gender Justice, gather on the occasion of the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women to raise our collective voices for the equality, rights, safety and justice of all women, girls, LGBTIQ peoples and other marginalized groups amidst the unprecedented challenges we face in the digital age.

Our current gender, social and environmental contexts are deeply impacted and shaped by the rapid pace and scope of technological changes. On the one hand, digital technologies have opened up opportunities for movement-building in transnational feminist and social justice activisms, including through inspiring uprisings for equality and justice such as #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, #LeyOlimpia, #BlackLivesMatter, #FridaysForFuture and the #GreenNewDeal. We stand firmly behind the leadership of all women-, girl-, youth- and LGBTIQ-led defiance against patriarchal powers around the world and are inspired and informed by these movements and their political demands.

Simultaneously, we are witnessing such an uprising today, as protesters in Iran have taken to the streets to call truth to power in support of women's bodily autonomy and do so amidst government-led internet and social media outages which stifle mobilization and information dissemination. This is not an isolated incident. Technologies are increasingly being utilized to marginalize, oppress, censor, monitor and violate women, girls, LGBTIQ individuals and environmental rights defenders worldwide, as well as marginalize many in the Global South where the majority who still lack access to internet services reside and work.

Rapid information and technological change is also affecting expressions and experiences of patriarchal masculinities across the globe, amplifying the capacity for men's rights and other misogynistic groups to plan, organize and mobilize violence against women and girls both online and offline. Authoritarian, militaristic, and patriarchal governments continue to use their increasing technological capacities to monitor civilians, especially women-, indigenous-, religious minority-, (dis)ability-, LGBTIQ- and environmental- rights defenders.

Therefore, gender transformative work with men and boys is critically important, including in amplify messaging of alternative expressions of manhood, in organizing against anti-feminist actors and online misogynistic media and groups, and to develop better strategies alongside feminist, youth, LGBTIQ and other marginalized movements in calling for feminist systems transformation in information and technology.

We call on all Governments at CSW67, and especially to all men in positions of power, to make bold and progressive commitments to advance women's rights and gender justice in the digital sphere and to stand in solidarity with women's, girls' and LGBTIQ rights on- and off-line.

### Patriarchal digital violence and exclusion

In 2019, the number of internet users worldwide was 4.13 billion, indicating that only half of the global population is currently connected to the internet. Gender-based barriers continue to constrain girls' and women's access and uptake of means for digital connectivity. Feminist advocates have highlighted the impact of digital technologies in deepening the marginalization of women, girls and LGBTIQ individuals. Serving as a medium of interpersonal communication, public discourse and political speech, the internet both reinforces and expands the operations of oppressive behaviors and gendered power hierarchies. Women are 27 times more

likely than men to be targeted by tech-related violence. Women also experience manifestations of online violence and digital exclusion which are affected by intersectional forms of discrimination, including race, age, class, caste, and level of ability.

Evidence shows that the impacts of digital misogyny and online violence are limiting girls' and women's participation in their public and political lives. Women human rights defenders, activists, journalists and politicians are directly targeted, threatened, harassed or even killed for their work. They receive online threats, generally of a misogynistic nature, often sexualized and gendered. The violent nature of these threats leads to self-censorship. Not only do digital misogyny and online violence have political effects; they serve specific political purposes and interests as well as on-ground impact. Their personal information being shared on social media also makes them vulnerable to violence from extremist groups in their daily lives. Recognizing that digital technologies facilitate not merely interpersonal communication but political speech, action and mobilization means that the political and patriarchal forces at work on the internet must be acknowledged.

Furthermore, online sexual violence has been responsible for the suicide of dozens of women across the world after the non-consensual dissemination of their sexually intimate images. There is a growing practice among young men and boys of violating the sexual intimacy of their girlfriends, colleagues, or even family by sharing pictures and videos with sexual content in digital groups (instant messaging chats, social media or even sexual exploitation markets commonly called porn pages). These are obtained either consensually by sexting (in a context of mutual trust and intimacy), or not, by non-authorized access to their private devices or accounts or by filming and photographing their body without consent.

We also know links exist between extremist violence and misogyny. This is evident with the increasingly serious incidents of violence committed by young men, predominantly in North America who self-identify as incels (involuntary celibates). These groups, termed as the 'manosphere', mobilized, grew affinity for and coordinated actions by means of social media platforms. This ideological affinity to sexism, misogyny and male supremacy is growing through online spaces, with content creators targeting young men and boys with messaging which encourages, condones and often glorifies violence against women and girls.

Hence, we believe that anti-patriarchal work with men and boys is a critical strategy to advance women's rights and gender justice, on and off-line, and can have meaningful and lasting contributions, when worked in solidarity with feminist, youth and LGBTIQ movements. It includes seeking to understand the role of information and communication technologies in maintaining patriarchal norms, and in socializing young men and boys into patriarchal masculinities. This work has focused on media literacy in relation to the objectification of women and girls across many forms of media (TV shows, music lyrics, advertising campaigns), and countering the stereotypical representations of violence (in movies, TV and computer gaming) and desensitizing boys and young men to patriarchal violence.

There is an urgent need to develop more contextually-specific analyses of and responses to digital sexual and gender-based violence and men's involvement in the manosphere, including strategies for building alternative online spaces for young men in particular, which can support them in rejecting the misogynistic messaging that surrounds them online. Such alternative online communities can also become spaces for building trusting relationships of 'knowing', by sharing factually based peer knowledge to counter the deliberate spread of false information, not least in relation to the facts of gender inequalities.

## Recommendations:

- Explore the important roles that men and boys can play in preventing and eliminating VAWG and other marginalized groups within the virtual sphere, including challenging gender stereotypes and patriarchal power dynamics, harmful social norms, attitudes and behaviors that underlie, perpetuate and reinforce violence and discrimination online
- Develop communications campaigns, initiatives in the media and programming that promote non-violent actions, attitudes and values by men and boys, and encourage them to take active part in efforts to prevent and eliminate GBV in the digital sphere.
- Combine community organising work with transforming narratives in the media and use technology and social media to keep the conversation happening, in order to create shifts in how people perceive issues around violence and discrimination.
- Bring together media and technology for community mobilization in grassroots work, which can be a powerful tool to transform norms, attitudes, behaviors and institutions.
- Strengthen understanding of the technological contexts in which gender transformative work with men and boys is operating, and the challenges and opportunities created by technological change.
- Accountability and engagement of multiple stakeholders is essential to enable more women to access and sustain their participation in the new media. Initiatives should be led by CSOs, involving other duty-bearers, such as the government, youth educators, media makers, and police along with platform owners/providers.
- Mobilize and allocate funding for supporting initiatives to combat violence against women and create safer online spaces, including in the school and university curriculums.
- Develop national legal documents with a clear procedure to address the issue of online violence. Governments' perspectives of VAWG online tend to be limited to online financial frauds.
- Address misogynist biases among the police and judiciary in dealing with cases of online harassment and abuse, including by capacity strengthening, and clarifying the ambiguities in the existing laws, mishandling of violence and harassment cases by either trivializing them or by a lack of knowledge of the justice system.
- Lay down the laws around legal accountability of digital media platforms, including the provision of compensation on the platforms, making them more effective in promoting responsible usage (e.g., information on fake news).
- Raise public awareness on the responsibilities and responsible use of media platforms and information technologies.
- Implement legal and regulatory frameworks that promote technological innovation in the political, economic and social spheres, with a view to advancing meaningful use and adoption by all including the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society.