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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable
development: the role of digital technologies on social
development and well-being of all.**

Statement submitted by Family Education Services Foundation (FESF), 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

In accordance to the provisional agenda and documentation for the fifty-ninth session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD59), Family Education Services Foundation (FESF), an education NGO working to promote inclusive and holistic access to education, skills-training for the marginalized segments of community, especially persons with disability (PWD), welcomes the priority theme of Commission on “Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all”.

As highlighted in the Expert Group Meeting (August 2020), areas of attention include inequality and the growing digital divide. As the COVID19 pandemic has highlighted devastating impact on social development around the world, especially in the most vulnerable communities, the intersectionality of socio-economic (income and non-income) inequalities are closely associated with the lack of policies to reduce the gap in ICTs which directly impact access and quality to and of basic human needs.

We urge Member State Pakistan and other developing states to further deepen the normative basis with fostering a collective behaviour, civil society voice and accountability to ensure minority participation towards securing a socially just transition towards an inclusive development that ensures dignity and equality.

We reaffirm our commitment of building capacity for sustainable networks within Member State Pakistan and within the international community towards human development. Encouraged by American TelePhysician’s use of digital technology to provide access and awareness to quality health and well-being through a holistic tele-medicine portal, we urge participants to secure multi-stakeholder platforms towards solutions-based robust and active societies.

We recognize that the global community is transitioning towards a knowledge-based economy harnessed by the potential of ICTs in all areas of development. **We further recognize** that technological advances are not neutral with respect to their impact and depend on by whom, for whom, and for what purpose they are developed and deployed. FESF believes that digital technologies hold the promise of facilitating a transition towards sustainable development and advancing living standards and well-being for all, especially those marginalized.

We reaffirm the Commission’s fifty-ninth Expert Group outcome that although rapid digital transformation advances social progress, it also introduces the need for better policy formulation around human rights and security, threats to personal privacy and dignity and freedom. FESF advocates and monitors digital governance to ensure transparency, trust and accountability in how technologies and data within the institution are managed and utilized.

We realize the widening of inequality at large, with an increasing concentration on wealth and influence on policy. Inequality in all its dimensions – in income, wealth, access to education, healthcare, safe drinking water and sanitation, sufficient, safe and nutritious food, social protection or ICTs – we believe, is in fact a substantial barrier towards achieving sustainable development. Therefore, we encourage the modalities of developing human capital. FESF has introduced computer literacy in curricula at an early age and has converted learning material to digital format in local context with the provision of Pakistan Sign Language (PSL), English/Urdu text and visual graphics. FESF has provided these materials free of cost for download. As a leader in Pakistan Sign Language (PSL) digital learning materials, FESF has provided access to 250 schools across Pakistan to enable over 20,000 students.

We recognize that technology is used to bridge the gap in marginalized communities, specifically between the hearing and deaf community members, by the

utilization of relevant digital materials and access to ICTs. As highlighted by the COVID19 pandemic, inequalities in the most vulnerable communities are more pronounced and harder to bridge. FESF developed a distance learning program based on hardware and digital content as a rapid response to the pandemic with teachers conducting online sessions via zoom to train community members in the health and hospitality sector.

We reaffirm the EGM Regional Breakout Session of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP)'s recommendations to improve digital inclusion by developing technological infrastructures, providing affordable access, enhancing digital skills among excluded and disadvantaged groups; identifying connected and unconnected communities; understanding the specific needs of different groups in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations; ensuring that easy and affordable access to digital technology not endanger personal privacy, dignity, and freedom; mainstreaming digital technology policies and programmes into general public policy development and implementations; creating public-private partnerships with the involvement of civil society, groups in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations, and building on volunteerism within societies; strengthening evidence-based policymaking; developing a whole-of government approach that connects different government entities and develops and implements digital technologies plans and policies.

We urge all participants to accelerate commitments to the closing the digital divide, in all its forms and dimensions of inequality and to build trust in both digital technology in government as we, part of the global community, find ourselves at a critical juncture to take action if we are to realize a socially just transition towards a new paradigm.
