



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
29 November 2022

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-seventh session

6–17 March 2023

**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 Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 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 Episcopal Church is a Christian denomination of 1.8 million members in 17 nations in North America, Latin America & the Caribbean, Europe and Asia & the Pacific and a member province of the worldwide Anglican Communion, the third largest Christian denomination.

As Christians, Episcopalians believe that God is the originator of all creation and created all humans equally in God's image, worthy of dignity, love, liberty, and life-giving relationships with God and each other. Our scriptures, Jesus' way of love, and our baptismal covenant call us to love God and each other as ourselves, to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to care for creation. Responding to God's abundant grace and love, we affirm the call to empower women and girls in all their diversity, including those identifying as transgender and non-binary persons.

Our Christian values explain The Episcopal Church's affirmation of United Nations international conventions, agreements and declarations calling for just and equal treatment of women and girls in all their diversity. Episcopalians support women and girls through their mission, programs, legislation, policies and advocacy by individuals, women's groups, congregations, dioceses, schools, seminaries, agencies and networks. Women and girls participate in society as innovators, entrepreneurs, stakeholders, decision-makers, educators, caretakers, Indigenous and traditional knowledge keepers, storytellers and speakers.

Episcopalians have embraced evolutions in innovation and technology, and education in a digital age, over decades. From 1973 - 2022, Episcopal governing bodies adopted 37 resolutions on technology, expressing "gratitude" and encouraging broad operational and programmatic adoption, including online resources and communications. Episcopalians addressed education in a digital age as early as 1988, with governing bodies encouraging use of computers in educational ministry. Since then, Episcopal churches, schools and seminaries have adapted online tools for Christian theological education, formation, and training. For example, the National Association of Episcopal Schools has provided a variety of professional development opportunities for teachers and chaplains around the responsible use of technology in Episcopal schools. Churches and schools offer scholarships for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and online connection hubs, and the Church has developed an online search tool for ministry discernment committees and female clergy applicants. Episcopalians have called for public investment in economic transition for education and job training for growing industries such as the technology sector.

While celebrating advancements, realized in part by and for women and girls, we urge member states, United Nations entities, and civil society to:

Extend accessibility to all and prioritize marginalized women and girls

Innovation and technology, and education in a digital age, empower women and girls by extending access to health care, education and training, flexible work arrangements and online community. Yet, the benefits are unequally experienced. We must close the unequal digital divide in availability and accessibility to technological know-how, digital equipment, infrastructure, and public services. People in geographically isolated communities and developing countries, people with disabilities, marginalized groups of women and girls and vulnerable communities are often left behind. Women with less education, older generations and women in traditional societal gender roles may not grasp or have access to technology's applications. Women and girls lag in educational and career opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Innovation and technology demand

significant research, public investments, community participation, budgetary priorities, and gender-responsive design and policies to be sustainable and inclusive.

Decision-makers also must confront sexism, colonialism, racism and discrimination as root causes and drivers that have marginalized women and girls for hundreds of years. We declare unacceptable the inequalities and sufferings experienced by Indigenous women; women of color; women of African descent; women experiencing discrimination for their ethnicity, race, caste, descent, language, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity/expression; women with disabilities; women experiencing poverty; migrants, refugees, internally displaced, undocumented, or stateless women; rural women; older and ageing women; and women heads of households. Often, they are not consulted on matters affecting them directly, and are especially vulnerable to online stereotyping and bullying. When Episcopalians embraced the call to “leave no one behind” and “reach the furthest behind first” in Agenda 2030, they committed to prioritizing these populations.

Ensure human rights protections, safety, and security

In 2022, Episcopalians acknowledged that technology opens new doors for connection and possibility but also mechanisms for surveillance and intrusion, and that we have not fully grappled with practical and ethical implications of the Digital Age. They recognized technology’s uses, abuses, possibilities and detriments in our daily and institutional lives, and the ethical implications of the new Digital Age for connections to each other and to creation. Furthermore, despite their benefits, technologies jeopardize the dignity, privacy, security and human rights of women and girls through identity theft, fraud, tracking tools, manipulative algorithms, involuntary permanent data collection and unregulated artificial intelligence.

Technology also exacerbates and generates new encounters, spaces, and forms of violence against women and girls: online abuse targeting women in leadership and public life, social media’s negative effects on mental health, cyberbullying, exposure to age-inappropriate, sexualized, and violent content, cyberstalking and harassment, online grooming by sexual predators, prostitution rings and human trafficking networks, nonconsensual sexting, and revenge porn. These violations call for greater awareness, education and protection of human rights, digital regulatory action, and law enforcement. Episcopal efforts to address these concerns include the National Association of Episcopal Schools partnering with the International Task Force on Child Protection to explore strategies for keeping young people safe while promoting human rights.

Accelerate gender equality education for all

Innovation and technology have not overcome the overarching systemic barriers that cause persistent gender inequalities. We must continually address gender imbalances in meeting basic socio-economic, social, and political needs and promote gender equality education. Gender equality only will be realized once the whole of society understands its social, economic, and political benefits and agrees to transform root causes.

The Episcopal Church urges member states, the United Nations, civil society and all people to:

universally observe international legal frameworks including Agenda 2030, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography;

allocate 0.7% of national operating budgets for Sustainable Development Goals;
research and report scientific evidence of impact on and responses by women and girls using gender-specific indicators and sex-disaggregated data;

support public investment to close the digital wealth and racial divide in access to technology and technology education;

engage women in decisions affecting themselves, their families, and communities;

lift women's leadership, support gender inclusive approaches to and make available as resources institutions and providers working with poverty alleviation, and addressing inequalities;

amplify voices and prioritize participation of marginalized women and girls in planning, resource allocation and programs;

uphold the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous women and girls;

regulate technology companies to protect consumers, especially children and youth, from unreasonable surveillance, personal data collection, addictive features, and harmful content;

regulate digital technology and artificial intelligence use in the workplace;

regulate data collection and storage by public authorities, including local, national and international law enforcement agencies, to safeguard society while preventing unreasonable intrusions of privacy;

ensure data and technology companies conduct ethical reviews of their products and impacts, especially for vulnerable populations, and create processes to mitigate harm;

promote human rights education and awareness and enforce protections locally, nationally and internationally;

continue multi-stakeholder collaborations and grassroots awareness campaigns to end gender violence;

strengthen regulatory and judicial protections in digital spaces, including law enforcement, for all women and girls, especially survivors of violence;

extend access to basic resources, public services, social protections and sustainable infrastructure for women and girls, including education and training, universal health care, maternal and infant health, sexual and reproductive health, equal access to health care regardless of gender, paid family leave, affordable and safe childcare, viable social security systems, living wages for all and equal pay for equal work;

promote gender equality education for all, irrespective of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and engage men and boys;

ensure gender equality in consultation, policy design, decision-making, leadership, and representation.

Innovation, technology, and education in a digital age must benefit and protect all. The Episcopal Church calls upon member states, the United Nations, civil society, and all people to uphold the values, principles, programs and legislation for gender justice and human rights.