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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 Forum Azzahrae pour la Femme Marocaine, 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

We are honored in Forum Azzahrae for Moroccan Women, which is a Moroccan network that includes about 130 women's civil society organizations in various geographical areas of Morocco, in the urban and rural areas, that works to defend women's rights and remove all forms of discrimination and injustice against them and strives to promote family friendly public policies for safe and stable families to present this written statement in view of the holding of the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women by March 2023.

We also salute the Commission on the Status of Women for choosing the theme of the 67th session, and we express our appreciation for the important efforts made in recent years in many developing countries to achieve equality and empowerment for women and girls. However, we note with great regret that the path to achieving the expectations and demands regarding the full guarantee of human rights for all is still long and requires more concerted efforts.

The aspects of corruption, tyranny, the absence of democracy in many countries, the continued occupation of some countries, the continuation of conflicts and wars, and insecurity, not to mention the alarming climate shifts that threaten humanity with famine, drought and illegal immigration, all constitute the most prominent challenges and the most important obstacles in the path of achieving the sustainable development goals, enabling Human dignity and freedom.

Moreover, the pandemic unfortunately revealed a human rights crisis in a number of countries and regimes that took advantage of the pandemic's circumstance to affect the rights and freedoms of individuals, women and men, a situation still on going, by continuing to adopt exceptional measures imposed by the pandemic in a number of countries; which would not allow the safe recovery of humanity at the legal and economic level.

The period of the pandemic has shown the importance of technology in the future of humanity, and the necessity of using digital mechanisms to keep the world connected. On the other hand, it revealed a huge digital divide between countries and societies that perpetuated inequality and discrimination between rich and developing countries, and within a single country, between the urban and rural world, as well as between men, women and girls.

We at Forum Azzahrae consider that accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals and securing passage towards a more just and equitable future for all passes through focusing on two basic matters: First working to ensure the rights of girls and women within the framework of dignity and fair equality and combating all forms of violence and discrimination against them, including the new forms of violence made possible by digital openness; second ensuring the quality of education in line with technological transformation while promoting competition and creativity.

Violence against women, girls and the digital world

Violence against women is a violation of human rights, as it is a confiscation of their right to a decent life. It prevents them from enjoying basic rights and freedoms, not to mention the impact of violence on families and children in particular, as violence has social and psychological repercussions that last for several generations, not to mention the economic cost of gender-based violence. Rather, forms of violence against women have evolved and diversified, as there is a modern face of violence against women, which is electronic and digital violence, which is spreading widely, due to the spread and ease of use of technology.

Therefore, as much that digitization constitutes an opportunity to empower women and express their capabilities, it has also become a space for another type of violence and psychological harm, including cases of depression and threats to safety and physical security that may move outside the virtual space and pose problems to the right to privacy of girls and women in the digital space. Therefore, states have a duty to protect their dignity and safety.

In this context, we stress the need to protect girls from information and digital materials that are harmful to their well-being and affect their psychological and cognitive balance, and to ensure their protection from all forms of violence, harm, physical or mental abuse, neglect or exploitation, including sexual exploitation.

Education in the digital age: Recommendations for equality

The use of digital technology has many benefits in the context of realizing the right to education, such as improving girls' access and quality of education, but it cannot be relied on alone to solve a number of problems in educational systems. The adoption of digitization in the field of education in general without a clear plan, would lead to indirect discriminatory effects represented in violating the right to equality and non-discrimination. Technology may contain an inherent bias that should be reduced and addressed, as the advantages of digitizing education are primarily in the interest of privileged segments of society, that is, segments that have access to quality education, good network connections, and professionally and appropriately designed equipment and software.

One of the most important challenges of digitizing education is equality and inclusion, which would exacerbate the already existing inequality in access to education between rich and poor countries and between girls and boys. Nearly half of the world's population, the majority of them women, are in developing countries. They are still unable to get access to the Internet, so girls and women's right to education should be supported in the context of digitalization.

For this we suggest the following:

- Strengthening efforts to ensure gender equality in education in general, and in qualitative and academic education in particular, emphasizing the importance of qualitative education, training and development in the field of science, technology and scientific research, and involving women and girls at all levels and fields.
- The necessity of governments' commitment to take practical and urgent measures in order to bring schools closer to rural girls and to provide free and safe shelters, while developing monitoring, reporting and protection mechanisms to secure the school environment and enable girls to complete their school stages in safety and freedom.
- Develop urgent and effective plans and procedures to completely eliminate illiteracy of all kinds, including digital illiteracy, because it is one of the main reasons for the gap recorded between rich and developing countries, one that deepens the imbalance at the global level.
- Emphasizing the responsibility of countries and governments to establish educational policies aimed at developing educational curricula and pedagogical equipment in line with technological development, while equipping educational institutions, granting free internet connectivity and providing the necessary logistical needs to keep pace with the digital transformation.

- Disseminating digital libraries and facilitating access to them to provide an appropriate and encouraging environment for scientific research, self-learning and creativity.
 - Advancing public education and exempting educational supplies from taxes, including digital educational means, with the need to emphasize the importance of developing physical school education and developing teachers' competencies in dealing with modern digital means because digital education cannot be a substitute for the physical school and interaction with the teacher.
 - Strict monitoring and evaluation of the commitments of governments and states to the extent to which they guarantee the right of girls to an education that keeps pace with technological transformations, while working to reduce the digital divide and the causes of increasing social disparity between girls and women in major cities and between them and girls in villages.
 - Working to create hearing centers in educational institutions to provide psychological support, and thus help girls to find the psychological balance necessary to continue studying in the best conditions.
 - Strengthening the presence of women in decision-making positions, especially in the field of education, to ensure balanced policies that take into account fair gender equality and to enable girls to participate in decision-making positions.
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