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Priority Theme: Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Statement submitted by The Blue Tree Foundation and the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Resolutions to bridge digital gap and digital dysfunction to create full and productive employment and decent work

The Blue Tree Foundation and the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency propose the need for a system, international cooperation, education dissemination, and digital company obligations for youths suffering from digital dysfunction and digital gap that disrupt productive employment and the creation of decent work.

Digital technology, which has been developing at the fastest pace in human history during the 21st century, is the greatest opportunity and biggest threat to modern-day people. Over the past few years, the dependence and commercialization of digital technology have increased even more rapidly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations warned of a significant increase in inflammatory hate speech and cybercrime as Internet usage increased during the pandemic; and the International Telecommunication Union data of the increase in Internet users from 4.1 billion (54% of the world's population) in 2019 to 4.9 billion (63%) proves how much the Internet environment has spread in a short period.

As a result, both emerging and advanced countries are facing the dysfunction and division of digital technology that they have never experienced before; in particular, emerging countries are accelerating the vicious cycle of unemployment and poverty due to the serious digital divide. According to the Pew Research Center in the United States, advanced countries had higher smartphone ownership rates than emerging countries and were more likely to be owned by younger and more educated people. In other words, in the digital era, youth living in countries that lack digital technology, which directly affects economic growth, limit access to quality education as well. This situation causes mankind to lose existing jobs and allows only the higher-educated people using more advanced digital technology to survive, worsening the polarization.

Meanwhile, advanced countries are also frequently experiencing dysfunctions such as cyberbullying due to the proliferation of digital technology. According to the 2022 National Research on School Violence and Cyber Violence conducted by the Blue Tree Foundation, the victim rate of cyberbullying among Korean students has tripled from 5.3% in 2019 to 16.3% in 2020, and nearly doubled to 31.6% in 2021. The trauma and wounds caused by cyberbullying experienced at a young age are not quickly dissolved and linger as digital footprints, negatively affecting youth employment and economic activities. Those affected by cyberbullying are not able to follow the school curriculum due to mental trauma or necessary procedures such as counseling, treatment, and legal resolution, or suffer from depression, resulting in a loss of motivation and confidence for economic activities.

In addition, these problems have spread to general households, creating an unstable youth group. Over 1,800 young people from 46 countries participated in a brief survey on emotional wellbeing conducted by the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency in January 2021. The answers showed that young people, especially vulnerable youth, have experienced some of the most severe consequences of isolation, decreased education and job opportunities, and reduced leisure activities. The same study included interviews with 150 youth information and counselling professionals who reported an unprecedented increase in mental health issues and distress among young people reaching their services.

Meanwhile, several previous studies showed that the digital dysfunction phenomenon that occurred in advanced countries is appearing similarly in emerging

countries, as digital civilization has gradually developed. In particular, India, which has the highest economic growth rate in the 21st century, is one of the countries with the highest rate of cyberbullying in the world and is increasing every year. Similarly, more than half of South Africa's parents also say their children are victims of cyberbullying. However, these emerging countries with economic and educational level gaps compared to advanced countries lack the ability to respond to digital dysfunction, directly impacting quality jobs and economic growth. As digital technology replaces human jobs, emerging countries experiencing the digital divide are losing jobs for people, and advanced countries are losing the motive for employment and economic activities due to digital dysfunction.

In response, the Blue Tree Foundation and the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency propose the following. Firstly, the enactment of laws to prevent and respond to numerous problems occurring online is urgently required. Problems that have occurred in reality are also occurring online and specific systems for clear international standards and responses such as definition, type, and national and local government responsibilities are insufficient. Digital harm is exposed to everyone, but no one is responsible for it in the event of damage, burdening the individuals to solve the situation. In addition to defining problems with digital well-being and safety, research on the blind spots of the current laws and systems and countermeasures should be prepared.

Secondly, an international organization dedicated to solving the dysfunctional problem of digital technology development should be established. The damage caused by digital dysfunction is not a problem only for any one country. New digital sex crimes such as digital emotional poverty of children after COVID-19, online sexual violence, and digital grooming, digital education gaps, unfair transactions through blockchain systems, and income polarization will become a common problem for people around the world. Special international conferences must be held to publicize issues and promote solidarity among countries, solving global problems occurring across borders through international cooperation.

Thirdly, it is necessary to ensure that everyone in the world can receive education as a basic human right to prevent becoming a victim of digital technology. It is important for young people to have access to information and counselling services to help prevent them from becoming victims of cyber violence and hate speech. Youth information and counseling play a crucial role in supporting young people's life transitions, resilience, and autonomy. Through providing them with accurate and unbiased information and guidance, youth information services can help equip them with the tools and knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their lives and challenges, helping them to maintain their sense of self-worth and independence. Media and information literacy, an integrating part of youth information provision according to the European Youth Information Charter, is also an important tool for young people to understand their role as digital citizens and protect themselves from eventual dangers, helping young people identify and challenge fake, harmful or hateful content, and to develop the skills, attitudes and knowledge to create their own positive and respectful online spaces. If these educational programs are recommended or mandatory as a system, jobs such as professional instructors and operational organizations can be created, guaranteeing sustainable education.

Finally, digital companies must be held accountable for their social responsibilities and strengthen the international cooperation system through international organizations under the United Nations. More than half of the world's top 10 market capitalization companies are information technology companies, which also showed surged sales during the pandemic. Therefore, they must be given opportunities to fulfill their responsibilities for digital dysfunction by providing jobs,

an appropriate educational environment, and digital devices necessary to live in a new era. Corporate participation will contribute to achieving sustainable development, the common goal of mankind, by creating shared value beyond corporate social responsibility. In response, the Blue Tree Foundation has been creating social impact by carrying out meaningful corporate social contribution projects such as youth digital citizenship education ‘Harmonious Digital World’ with Kakao since 2016, and preventive education for youth cyber violence ‘Cyber Jungle Guardian Blue Elephant’ with Samsung since 2020.

As a result, the Blue Tree Foundation and the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency urge the international community, public and private stakeholders in each member state to recognize the seriousness of various problems online and take active action and measures for prevention and eradication.
