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entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Fondazione Proclade Internazionale - Onlus, 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.

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* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Fondazione PROCLADE Internazionale-onlus is a foundation of the Claretian Missionaries that promotes and engages in the integral social development activities; it coordinates to a network of registered organizations from 70 countries that actively collaborate with the Claretian Missionaries, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

In the framework of the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, whose central theme is Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital era to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women, we supportively make the following statement:

Women Rights

Women in urban areas have more favourable access to new technologies and opportunities compared to those in rural areas; most urban women are vocal and empowered. In most circumstances, women's rights are not fully respected, and discrimination occurs.

Some African cultures still practice female genital mutilation and thus force girls to undergo mutilation against their will; if they refuse, they are segregated and prohibited from participating in some family or community functions.

Technological advances and social networks have brought about a great development in communication. However, they remain a hostile and dangerous for girls, adolescents and young women. Women are victims of scams, human trafficking, pornography networks and manipulation by criminal groups.

Education and the digital divide

During the pandemic, the digital divide was highlighted on the public agenda, especially access to the Internet. Mothers, many of them heads of households, were responsible for accompanying their children throughout the online school process, attending classes and doing homework. These actions were in addition to the essential daily care they provided at home in the midst of a series of precarious situations. This is especially burdensome, as many families with several children often do not have mobile devices.

In many countries, educational processes, even before the pandemic, were already deficient, and with the pandemic, this situation worsened. In fact, classes became virtual, but this did not lead to an improvement in the quality of education or a reduction in the digital divide. On the contrary, it caused many students, especially girls and young women, to drop out of the school system.

Internet access conditions were not created proportionally to online use within the educational systems, and families did not have the financial resources to purchase devices, let alone an Internet network plan. Girls and young adolescents attend schools on average on a smaller scale, due to the macho and patriarchal thinking of most families in vulnerable situations.

In terms of education, boys and girls have the same rights and opportunities, but there is a different paradigm between those who live in the city and those who live in rural areas. Some of those who live in rural areas may consider it optional and less important. Cultural factors influence the idea that women and girls are in charge of the household. Some husbands do not allow their wives to seek education and obtain employment, claiming that it is the man's responsibility to support the family; this prevents women from obtaining a quality education.

Digital divide and job exclusion

The digital divide is not only due to a lack of access to technology, but also to the lack of technological training needed by many adult women; in many areas of the world, women of previous generations grew up in an infrastructure that did not support modern technology. In rural areas, girls are isolated from childhood from science and technology. As a result, most men have a level of education that allows them to obtain employment more easily.

In terms of access to technology, women and girls are largely unable to activate their immense potential within digital learning because they have not been equipped with job skills to perform certain roles. There is a significant gap between men and women in terms of digital employment opportunities and, consequently, digital skills. In many places, men hold the top jobs, in media, engineering, coding, etc. Women have less access to technology compared to men. This is partly due to the marginal and cultural norms of societies, and women's conditions are considered inferior to men's; there is a misconception that technology is a man's job and is a male domain. This is accompanied by the fallacy that women are less capable of working in the field of technology and are considered to be better at domestic tasks. Another misconception is that women are technophobic, and inherently lack interest and ability in technology.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, some women independently promoted new ventures that mitigated the impact of the crisis and helped their quality of life. However, these ventures have been for those living in urban areas (with good Internet access) and with a minimum of basic education. This is not the case of those girls and women from rural, indigenous and Afro-descendant sectors who have not had the possibility of a minimum education or cannot access technological tools, due to lack of economic conditions. The digital era has allowed women to use social networks and new communication technologies to denounce gender violence and other manifestations of exclusion suffered by women.

Free of charge and internet accessibility

Many governments do not promote free technology education or guarantee open wifi signals in public areas. Most public schools have no free access digital libraries and no provision of computers and digital tools.

Women in rural and popular sectors have not been able to access the subsidies offered by the State and other social policies, because they do not have Internet accessibility. Many of these offers are announced in digital platforms and generates a process of even greater marginalization that deepens poverty.

To generate equality for women and girls, governments have promoted training programs for women for entrepreneurial activities, educating women in the care and education of children. But these are still caregiving roles and not leadership roles.

It is necessary to promote the economic autonomy of women and their social recognition. We recognize how some governments have modified their legislation to make it possible for women to have the right to own land and to inherit. We also see changes in legislation that now prohibits child marriage, which is still a problem in several other countries. It should be encouraged in digital accessibility too.

Corruption and the digital divide

State corruption continues to be a phenomenon that hinders women's empowerment, as public resources earmarked for bridging the digital divide and technological training are lost in the criminal networks of public funds.

We urge the United Nations Member States:

Allocate resources for learning and use of digital resources, associated with entrepreneurship programs for the most vulnerable women and girls, from their places of habitation.

Recognize access to the internet as a human right that must be guaranteed by the State, implementing public internet networks and free access, creating digital rooms.

Implement a system of free and quality public education, equipped with the necessary digital tools to allow access to all, especially adolescent girls and women in rural/isolated areas.

Create public programs aimed at women heads of household in rural and urban sectors where they can leave their children in a place of care, while they study or work.

Elaborate, strengthen and promote a protection law for mothers and children who suffer violence, with care and reporting routes for acts of violence against women.

Create legislation and public policies that promote real conditions of protection for girls and women on social networks, combating human trafficking and child pornography.

That the owners of the communication companies that control social networks generate policies for the protection of women, since in many cases they allow the dissemination of threats and defamation campaigns against women human rights and environmental defenders.

Create online libraries and digital literacy for all, especially for women in rural areas.

Promote technological innovation projects in the creation of energy sources, guaranteeing the participation of women and enabling electrical and digital connection.

Creation of economic autonomy programs for women, credit facilities and market opportunities.

Generate dignified conditions in slums and empower women to become self-sufficient, especially within the digital market.

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