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**“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for
the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Association for Progressive Communications, 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.



Statement

Women and the media, including information and communication technologies

Women and the media is the issue on which Governments focus the least.

For the past 20 years, the media have continued to reflect attitudes and values consistent with the androcentric discourse that contributes to strengthening the present gender system as the natural order in social structures.

Women and the feminist movement have deployed multiple strategies over the past 20 years to discuss the situation of women and the media, as well as to raise awareness and achieve change. It is relevant to highlight the creation of specific material for the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the media, as well as the consolidation of media observatories at different levels to allow for revisions and recommendations for change in practice and content. Among many actions, media monitoring and research have been key in the process of generating reliable information to justify the development of specific policies and to carry out joint actions with journalists and other players.

Despite the abovementioned activities, the professional structure of the media, as well as its content, continues to reinforce gender stereotypes that perpetuate the subordinate role of women.

Most advanced countries have laws that mandate the equality of women in all spheres, but there are few public policies aimed at integrating people who have received gender training into the areas of decision-making and/or content production in the media.

In terms of employment, although women have entered the media sector, they are found mainly at the lower levels of the employment hierarchy. Thus, there are now more women journalists, producers, photographers, camera operators and even publishers, but the increased presence of women has not improved the distribution of responsibilities in decision-making, nor has it led to better salaries or improved treatment in the media of the issues. As one moves up the hierarchy in the media business, one finds mostly men, who decide what to publish or broadcast and in what manner.

In terms of content, sexist stereotypes persist. We often see and hear offensive treatment of women and women's issues, disguised as humour, that perpetuates their subordinate roles. According to studies by media observatories, considering women's bodies as mere objects of desire, with ideals of beauty, thinness, physical traits and ethnic type, encourages discrimination and inequality.

In addition, the way much of the media addresses the issue of violence against women is another challenge, especially in cases of femicide, in which often the victim's reputation is discussed rather than gender violence condemned.

Information and communications technology and women's right to communicate through the Internet

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, access to and the effective use of information and communications technologies have been included among the issues to be considered in the context of women's rights.

Despite the recommendations already made, and the rapid development and expansion in all areas of society of information and communications technologies, we do not find the same effort to mainstream gender policies in these technologies. This has led us to conclude that the conceptual framework for gender equity in the information society has been set aside.

The development and use of information and communications technologies are not gender neutral, and are conditioned by such factors as the degree of access and types of use, as well as the acquisition of skills, that increase the gender gap between men and women. The development of information and communications technology has generated differential impacts that must be analysed, taking into account existing inequalities. Relying on indicators that refer only to the access to information and communications technology of men and women combined, rather than disaggregating such indicators by sex, not only renders the inequality gap invisible, but also contributes to its amplification.

The data presented in different international documents confirm that equality is not an automatic result of growth and income distribution. The slow bridging of the gaps in the information and communications technology labour market, including sectors in which information and communications technology development is an integral part of production, shows that it is necessary to make visible the barriers to access. Such barriers to employment in the field of information and communications technology are still caused mainly by the fact that women are primarily responsible for unpaid work and care at home. If such a situation persists, one cannot expect transformative changes in women's patterns of access and use of information and communications technologies.

Now the challenge is to promote policies aimed not only at strengthening women's access to information and communications technology in all regions, no matter a woman's age, race or ethnicity, but also to encourage the development of skills and abilities that enable the use of appropriate technologies, serve to promote the economic, political and social empowerment of women and help to strengthen gender equality around the world.

Respecting the right of women and girls to access the Internet requires States to invest adequately in the integration of information and communications technology in education for women and girls, and to support their equal participation in political and public life through information and communication technologies. This includes taking measures to increase the digital literacy of women and girls, ensuring gender responsiveness in the promotion and protection of human rights on the Internet and ensuring women's participation in Internet governance. It also requires increasing the participation of girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and careers so they are able to influence Internet governance and development, including the adoption of technology policies that affect how the Internet and information and communications technologies are shaped.

Governments, companies and society should recognize that such emerging forms of technology-mediated violence as cyberstalking, cyberbullying, digital surveillance, the manipulation of personal information and images, misogynistic hate speech and online sexual harassment compromise the security and safety of women and girls and prevent them from taking advantage of the opportunities that information and communications technologies provide. Common responses of

women and girls, when confronted with violence online, are to self-censor, reduce participation or withdraw from the platforms and technology that they are using altogether. The absence of women and girls from such spaces is compounded by discriminatory cultural norms and practices in many educational environments that prioritize the education of boys over that of girls. In an increasingly digitized world, in which information and communications technology skills are becoming essential, women and girls are being left behind, not only educationally but also in terms of work opportunities.

To achieve gender equity in the information and communications technology field, women and girls should be able to fully harness the potential of information and communications technologies for education, empowerment and the exercise of their full range of human rights, so that they are not excluded from the opportunities for social, economic and political participation and leadership that access to the Internet and other information and communications technologies makes possible.

Recommendations

- States should not be indifferent to the situation of women in content development and decision-making in the media, including online publications and social networks, or to their access to information and communications technologies, in order to overcome structural inequality at all levels, eliminate gender discrimination and support women's equal rights and participation in society.
- Media companies should consider it imperative to take action to ensure women's access to senior positions and to promote information campaigns to generate content that is not discriminatory, stereotypical or sexist.
- Monitoring at the level of the State and civil society should be promoted and strengthened to raise awareness about women's equal rights and fair treatment in the media, including the Internet and social networks.
- Women and girls should be able to fully harness the potential of information and communications technologies for education, empowerment and the exercise of their full range of human rights through meaningful access to the Internet.
- Violence against women that is committed, abetted or aggravated through the use of information and communications technology and in online spaces should be recognized and addressed. Such violence acts as a significant barrier to the ability of women and girls to take advantage of the opportunities that information and communications technology provides for the full realization of their human rights.

The mission of the Association for Progressive Communications is to empower and support organizations, social movements and individuals through the use of information and communications technologies for human rights and development. The Association believes that gender equality and women's empowerment are relevant to all aspects of its mission. The Association counters discrimination, sexism, exclusion and violence against women in the design and usage of technology design, as well as in technology-related policies.