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Statement submitted by MARUAH (*Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism, Singapore*), 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution [1996/31](#).

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The focus of this statement is in relation to the questions that were posed on SDG4 and SDG16.

MARUAH's Focus:

Interconnectivity through digitized education is the pathway in Singapore. There's plenty of merit in taking on this approach as students and adults are capable of sourcing for information on their own. But we are also aware that digitized connectivity can also become weapons to cajole others into deviancy and violence. Including everyone and leaving no one behind is the best way to reduce any one person's vulnerability to bad practices and to reduce divisiveness in society.

MARUAH's Concerns

1. What is the level of governance in relation to access to digitized learning and facilitation that is taking place amongst school children and teenagers? Many amongst the young have their own individual computers, mobile phones, laptops. What is the nature of capacity building that is currently taking place?
2. There is a national Bill – Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill (POFMA) – that has been tabled for a Singapore Parliament debate. MARUAH states that this Bill is not an answer or a means to help the young, the adults and the growing population of the older persons, to become more critical in deciphering online disinformation and misinformation. Admittedly there is much content displaying voyeurism, heroism, violence, hatred. Yet this Bill is onerous as defining falsehoods is in itself a challenge and clarity is vague. And the power is given to any Minister to initiate proceedings against the writer or the distributor of 'falsehoods', using POFMA. This Bill when it is enacted, in its current form, will limit civil society participation, online critical enquiry and be divisive in society.
3. Any level of engagement in activism or sharing of information leaves civil society vulnerable to being charged with breaking the law or defamation. Recent incidents against activists who were accused of breaking the law despite non-violent actions. With all the laws, people would prefer to bury information, case studies that need to be shared so that they are known, and remedial actions can take place to ensure inclusivity, equality is for everyone.

MARUAH's recommendations:

- More participatory capacity building on critical thinking, personal responsibility on checking information and sharing;
- Singapore must ratify the Freedom to Information Act for the public to access resources and data.
