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### Statement submitted by Volontariato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo, 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.

## Statement

## Integrating e-learning in development programmes

Access to information and communications technology can entertain and enrich our lives, but can also play a role in achieving the broader Millennium Development Goals. Such technology can provide various channels to bring educational options to those historically excluded, including people in rural areas without schools, women facing social barriers that limit access to education, and students with disabilities or specific vocational training needs.

New modes of interaction and the transboundary nature of such interactions offer on the one hand opportunities for advancing human development, but on the other may pose risks entrenching existing inequities and/or creating new ones.

During the 10-year follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+10), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization promoted a new concept of Internet universality, encompassing a free, rights-based, open and accessible Internet. Freedom of expression, as in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was recognized during WSIS+10 as particularly important for progress towards inclusive knowledge societies. Throughout the conference and in its final statement, participants reaffirmed that freedom of expression off-line applies also to on-line.

Volontariato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo is strongly concerned with the issue of education in developing countries and recognizes the pivotal role of information and communications technology in improving education affordability and quality at all levels, especially for the poorest and most marginalized people. It acknowledges the importance of web- and mobile-based e-learning as a generator of quality learning and valuable human interactions. Moreover, it believes that virtual communication spaces should contribute to peaceful, just and inclusive societies that foster the full expression of human rights.

Recognizing the challenge of integrating information and communications technology in education, Volontariato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo would like to make the following recommendations to the high-level segment:

(a)  Technology should not drive education, rather, educational goals and needs must drive the use of technology. Information and communications technology cannot by themselves solve educational problems anywhere, especially in the developing world, as development problems are rooted in well entrenched poverty, social inequality and uneven development issues. Such technology, as educational tools can, if used appropriately, enable developing countries to expand access to and raise the quality of education;

(b)  In addition, the implementation of e-learning solutions in developing contexts requires careful consideration of issues such as infrastructure development, human capacity, language and content, culture, equity, costs and financial resources and pedagogy;

(c)  Moreover, ad hoc teaching and learning materials with locally meaningful content, preferably in the local languages, must be developed, to ensure that the Internet is a genuinely multicultural space and that people of different cultures have an equal voice in the global online learning and practice communities.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that software is often culturally biased. A computer programme is never presented as a culturally neutral tool that is able to solve problems of a universal nature. There are often, sometimes hidden, typical cultural connotations deriving from the social environment of origin which, in another culture, can seem different or lend themselves to cultural ambiguities. Problems, for example, can arise from an incorrect interpretation of metaphors used or from the game-oriented style found in some western software or even from the inadequacy of individualistic learning models embedded in e-learning platforms.

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