



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

**Statement submitted by Anglican Consultative Council, Association of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand, Church Women United Inc., Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Lutheran World Federation, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Inc., Salvation Army, The, United Church of Christ - Board for World Ministries, Women's Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, World Young Women's Christian Association, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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## Statement

Ecumenical Women at the United Nations, a coalition of Christian denominations and ecumenical organizations, represents over 550 million persons worldwide. We welcome the opportunity to address the 67th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”.

Over the last century, the world saw exponential growth in innovation, technology, and digital communications. These tools enable us to connect, engage, advocate, and improve communications. They can advance opportunities for women and girls worldwide and tackle systemic injustices and inequalities. While these advancements are potentially universal, opportunities are not felt equally worldwide. Inequalities in access and gender equity persist, undermining progress and protections for women and girls and their human rights, as well as in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recognizing a spiritual component of care for all peoples, we affirm the dignity and human rights of every individual. Made equal in the image of God, our Christian love informs our curiosity, learning, and teaching. We are committed to enabling the full and equitable participation of all in society’s decision-making processes and programs.

Therefore, we raise these concerns to the Commission:

### Enhance accessibility

For women and girls to achieve equal access and fully participate in technological change and innovation, accessibility must be addressed, including access to functional devices, infrastructure to provide stable internet connection, and electricity. The detrimental impact increases for those living with systemic poverty and/or structural racism. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted additional ways women and girls were lagging in digital access. We must also ensure that digital information and services are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Working with local agencies, we are reaching out to those in under-resourced populations, focusing on community engagement such as: scholarships for women and gender oppressed peoples, accessible and affordable training through existing specialist community networks, using existing resources in new ways to meet the needs of a post-pandemic cyber reality (such as extending access to devices and internet capabilities for children), and embrace existing emphasis on education for all peoples of all ages.

### Reimagine and invest in education in the digital age

Education is a great leveler to reduce inequality. Unfortunately, women and girls often have fewer opportunities for education, equal pay, and career advancement. Many girls, forced to leave school during the COVID-19 pandemic, are not projected to return, now supporting their families through child marriage and child labor. Reimagining and investing in education to provide the tools for learning in the digital age will be critical for women and girls to achieve equality, recognizing that vulnerable populations are made more vulnerable by gaps in educational opportunities.

Embracing equal education for all, we commit resources to counter existing gender-based disparities in technological change and innovation, through financial support to local education programs for children from underserved communities. Accessible and affordable education, scholarships, training, with particular attention to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, ensure creation of decent work and quality jobs. Systemic racism, gender injustice, poverty, under-resourced women’s health care, and marginalization prevent women and girls from achieving an equal education, marketable skills, and a chosen

career path. Accessible and affordable opportunities incorporating local and Indigenous knowledges are necessary. Working with community agencies, scholarships and training in technological fields encourage gender equality by empowering women and girls to full participation in educational opportunities.

Protect human rights, safety and security of women and girls

At the heart of gender justice, advocacy for the rights of women and girls promotes civil and political, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights, as provided for in international human rights instruments.

Innovation and technology provide opportunities for protecting the human rights, safety and security of women and girls. Advances in digital tools, educational and training opportunities, and new “apps” educate and promote awareness, and support groups to build community, through social media, investments in new technology, dating apps, online sexual predator lists and tracking tools, prevent trafficking in persons. These tools are powerful means to countering sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls..

Despite these advances, technology also creates new challenges that impact the privacy, safety and security of women and girls and undermine their dignity, well-being, and human rights. This results in an increase in hidden violence, gender discrimination, sexist encounters and harrasment. Privacy must be safeguarded, age-appropriate controls implemented, and domestic control of access to technology used appropriately.

Cybersecurity must counter fraud, disinformation, and hate speech, while increasing reliable information and providing ethical parameters for Artificial Intelligence.

Cyberbullying and abuse of social media can lead to harassment, stalking, victimization through sexualisation (sexting, nude photos or revenge porn), which can endanger mental health. Protecting human rights for women and girls in all their diversity must address discrimination based on race, age, language or other forms of identity. This is presented in online content, generational gaps in knowledge and opportunities, and unequal access to digital tools and platforms. Social media and other communications platforms must take seriously their efforts to prevent harassment.

We also recognize and support the benefits and rights to disconnect from technology for mental health and spiritual needs.

We call upon Member States and the United Nations to:

Foster and nurture collaborations with faith-based organizations. Already trusted locally, faith communities can embrace partnerships to respond to innovation and technological change, and education for a digital age. Through technology, faith communities can provide access to opportunities for women and girls.

Support gender-specific indicators to monitor progress through sex-disaggregated data and ensure production of reports highlighting the impact of innovation and technology on women and girls.

Fully implement UN agreements, including the Beijing Platform for Action, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Goals 4, 5, 9 and 10, the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women, and UN’s Special Procedures mandate on violence against women.

Increase accessibility by providing public services and infrastructure, universal internet access, electricity, functional digital devices and equipment in schools and community centers, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Enable social protections to facilitate women and girls’ full participation in technology, particularly gender-focused health care including reproductive rights, accessible and affordable education, scholarships, and training, especially for STEM fields. Ensure creation of decent work and quality jobs in technology.

Fulfill existing financial commitments and increase investment for women and girls, especially for education, technical assistance, digital literacy, job training, skills development, and dependent care assistance. Direct financing to communities and countries vulnerable to the digital divide.

Support women's decision-making, leadership, and political participation through gender-responsive, inclusive approaches. Engage intergenerational voices and perspectives, especially girls and young women.

Educate, promote and protect the human rights of women and girls relating to privacy, information and online safety and security, and safeguarding against gender violence, harassment and discrimination based on race, age, language or other forms of identity. Use technological tools to protect these rights.

Use innovation and technology advancements to raise awareness and address the risk of gender violence by funding programs that educate, train, provide support to local leaders, and address negative concepts of masculinity which can lead to abuse and violence.

Joint statement endorsed by Anglican Consultative Council, Association of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand, Church Women United Inc., Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Lutheran World Federation, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Inc., Salvation Army, The, United Church of Christ - Board for World Ministries, Women's Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, World Young Women's Christian Association, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.