



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 48th SESSION

Annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective throughout the work of the Human Rights Council and that of its mechanisms

27 September 2021

Opening Remarks

Ms. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: women and girls form the majority of the estimated 3.7 billion unconnected people in the world. The digital exclusion during the pandemic was accompanied by an increase in GBV, including online harassment and intimidation. Women from marginalized groups may experience particularly severe forms of online violence. **Developed countries should facilitate technology transfer to developing States and integrate programmes for women's and girls' access to digital technology in their development and assistance policies.** The Secretary-General's RoadMap for Digital Cooperation provides with an instrumental guide. The Generation Equality Forum in Mexico City in early 2021 launched a plan to advance gender equality by 2026.

Statements by the Panellists:

Ms. Tlaleng Mofokeng, Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health: the digital divide in much of the global South and other developing contexts affects women and girls in particular. Digital and AI solutions in the area of health are not neutral: most biomedical AI technologies ignore sex and gender, however AI is used for computer-based medical diagnosis; there are concerns about surveillance of health related information. Digital innovation remains a powerful tool and we must demand transparency and accountability.

Ms. Tatiana Vasconcelos, Disability consultant: the measures of social distancing and isolation drastically affected women and girls with disabilities who have to attend rehabilitation and training centres, that often become their only link with outer life. Contemplating the intersectionality between gender and disability together with the principle of the CRPD "Nothing about us, without us" will allow to address situations of inequality and discrimination from a multidimensional perspective.

Mr. Jaroslaw Ponder, Head of the Office for Europe at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU): the gender gap in technology also persists in the most advanced parts of the world; COVID-19 widened further the usage gap. The ITU launched Girls in ICT Day, that is now celebrated in over 170 countries. Partnerships (EQUALS: the global partnership, co-founded by ITU), processes (ITU is co-leading the Action Coalition on Innovation and Technology), and networks (Network of Women) are also fundamental. The ITU with UN Women undertook a study [on Women, Girls and ICT in the context of COVID-19 in Europe](#).

Ms. Lainah Ndiweni, Legal researcher, Veritas Zimbabwe: shared her organisation's experience of working with women and girls during the pandemic using the ICTs (creation of VERITAS interactive platform).

Statements by Council Members, Observer States and other Observers

Delegations that took the floor during the discussion (24 statements)¹:

Australia, EU, Luxembourg on behalf of BENELUX, Switzerland (on behalf of Austria, Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Switzerland), Norway on behalf of NB8, Chile on behalf of Group of Latin American countries (Argentina, Columbia, Costa-Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Chile), Barbados on behalf of CARICOM members in Geneva (Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago), Lesotho on behalf of LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Beneficiaries (Benin, Cambodia, Comoros, Gambia, Lesotho, Maldives, Mali, Mauritius, Nepal, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sudan, Suriname, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia), Egypt on behalf of Group of Arab Group, Israel, Canada, Greece, Egypt, Spain, France, FAO, Thailand, Angola, Viet Nam, India, Cyprus, UNFPA, Georgia, UN Women

¹ **Statements of delegations that were not delivered due to lack of time (25):** Benin, Botswana, Ecuador, IDLO, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Libya, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia, UAE, USA, available at the HRC Extranet [webpage](#).



Australia: Australia's eSafety Commissioner – the world's first government agency committed to keeping its citizens safe online – has a dedicated eSafety Women program. **EU:** stressed the importance of the [HRC resolution 6/30](#). **Luxembourg on behalf of BENELUX:** the digital divide has an inter-generational dimension; female journalists and women human rights defenders are particularly targeted. **Switzerland on behalf of the Group of countries:** *what concrete policy measures could be recommended to ensure an equitable participation of women in the digital economy?* **Norway on behalf of NB8:** stressed the importance of integration and implementation of a gender transformative perspective in the work of the HRC and the UN. **Chile on behalf of GRULAC:** the HRC and its mechanisms should deepen their analysis of the inequalities that arise from the digital gender gap. **Barbados on behalf of CARICOM members:** CARICOM member states have made good progress in reducing the most obvious digital divide; but pandemic highlighted other critical concerns: the quality of access, the ability to use the Internet effectively and the way Internet use affects access to goods and services. **Lesotho on behalf of LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund Beneficiaries:** stressed the importance of integrating gender-responsiveness in environmental issues; **Egypt on behalf of Arab Group:** stressed the importance of investing in promoting gender equality, empowering women, advancing their rights and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them. **Canada:** *how can states best overcome entrenched institutional obstacles to achieve digital gender inclusion?* **Greece:** has recently ratified the *ILO 190 Violence and Harassment Convention*; social media should assume their human rights responsibilities by following the *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*. **Egypt:** began its presidency of the Ministerial Conference on Women of the OIC by adopting a resolution on the challenges of the Corona pandemic on women and girls. **Spain:** co-leadership in the Economic Justice Coalition; drafted Charter of Digital Rights contains a chapter dedicated to equal rights, emphasizing the effective equality of men and women in digital environments. **France:** ensured that the consequences of the pandemic on gender equality were integrated into the commitments of the Generation Equality Forum. **FAO:** is committed to promote rural women's equal participation in the process of inclusive digital transformation of agri-food systems. **Thailand:** opportunities to expand the digital economy must proactively target women. **Angola:** commended UN Women's report "[Beyond COVID-19: A feminist plan for sustainability and social justice](#)". **Viet Nam:** efforts on gender equality should be accelerated, particularly on empowerment for women through inclusive finance, digital transformation and e-commerce. **India:** governmental Digital India flagship initiative has been promoting digital inclusion and empowerment in the country; **UNFPA:** tech companies and service providers should tackle technology-facilitated GBV. **Georgia:** Universal Internetization Project has been launched to address the gender digital divide; **UN Women:** called to duly address the range of gendered impacts of digital technologies.

NHRIs and NGOs (6 statements):

National Human Rights Commission India, European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Federation, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) (*joint statement*), Stichting CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, Plan International (*joint statement*), Action Canada for Population and Development (*joint statement*)

National Human Rights Commission India: investing in women and girls has a multiplier impact on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth, therefore, gender perspective needs to be adopted in nation building and global geo-politics at large. **European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Federation:** LGBTI women and girls continue to face specific obstacles in accessing ICTs and are exposed to threats to their safety – online and offline. **ARROW:** called upon states to recognise the reproductive rights and reproductive health services as essential and ensure universal access to quality safe abortion and post-abortion care services. **European Region of the ILGF:** LGBTI women and girls continue to face specific obstacles in accessing ICTs. **Stichting CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality:** called to ensure that technology surrounding SRHR are made available to all young people. **Plan International:** called to apply a child rights-based and gender transformative approach to the digital environment.

Final Remarks: **Ms. Tlaleng Mofokeng:** is committed to ensure that not only no one is left behind, but that we also centre on whose lives we aim to impact. **Ms. Tatiana Vasconcelos:** we need to develop public policies which bear in mind disability in an intersectional way. **Mr. Jaroslav Ponder:** there many ways how inclusiveness can be ensured, e.g. through building confidence in using ICTs by women and girls in different ways. **Ms. Lainah Ndiweni:** advocated for digital inclusiveness of women and girls.

Full video recording of the discussion is available on the [UN Web TV](#).