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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 International Federation of Business and Professional Women, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

According to various reports from the 77th session of the UN General Assembly on women, energy, agriculture, entrepreneurship, education and globalization, females of all ages have been disproportionately harmed by COVID19. More targeted gender-responsive recovery measures are needed to address the considerable gender gaps and inequalities. The focus of this year's discussions on education, innovation and technological change in the digital age is critical for achieving gender justice and equality and the economic empowerment of all women and girls. We support the review on the challenges and opportunities in achieving these goals, and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

We seek to harness the agency and potential of women and girls as leaders and frontliners of the future we want to create. We should constantly remind ourselves that achieving gender justice and equality is a goal in itself that is critical to attaining the other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Meanwhile, the global gender gap in labour force participation has been about 30% since 1990, with men's and women's participation at around 80% and 50%, respectively. Women and girls are underutilized resources for sustainable development. The internet and the metaverse are still inaccessible to women, many of whom face life-threatening adversity on a daily basis. We believe that technology can help level the playing field and speed the realization of our essential goals. In this connection, quality education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics plays a critical role in achieving SDGs and putting into practice a global agreement on gender transformative actions in entrepreneurship, science, technology and innovation.

Fourth industrial revolution technologies and the rapid digitalization sparked by COVID-19 are creating new economic opportunities and transforming all aspects of life. It is critical that women and girls get equal access to these technologies and the opportunities they create, especially with reference to decent work and entrepreneurship. At the same time, we are aware that current modes of technological advancement are not without dangers. Technology is a mirror that reflects societal predispositions and even prejudice. Efforts must be made to ensure that its use does not exacerbate inequalities, dismiss accountability, or allow its use to harass and violate. In the current environment of disinformation and misinformation, of fake news and troll farms, it is imperative to create an ecosystem that engages, that allows women and girls to rally as one to protect themselves while also rethinking the ways to participate in policy-making and bringing together diverse voices in both physical and virtual spaces.

We must continue to prioritise projects geared toward providing girls and women with basic needs and freedoms. Further, we must create a strong, supportive tech infrastructure that values ethics and consent. With women bearing the brunt of gender-based violence in real life and online, technology must be designed to support the right to privacy and full control over personal data and information online at all levels – even the right to be forgotten, should a woman choose, from the platforms she uses. There must be accountability in the metaverse and internet, and responsibility to protect, promote and fulfil, in order to bring about gender equality and women's empowerment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to devastating losses and aggravated existing problems, but the use of digital technologies has supported and facilitated the rapid adaptation to new challenges.

We believe that there is potential in the tech and digital realm to push for reforms and provide an enabling environment for the economic empowerment and full social development of women and girls.

Focus on the Twin Transition: Green and Digital

The current climate crisis has been aggravated by the pandemic that exposed and exacerbated long-standing social and gender inequalities, infringing upon women and girl's rights. We strongly recommend that the Commission on the Status of Women focuses on a twin transition – green and digital – for a stronger, more sustainable and brighter future. Green and digital transitions can reinforce each other, unlocking economic and societal benefits, contributing to fighting climate change and environmental degradation, and supporting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Gender Responsive Data and Rights-based Technology

It is important to recognize that addressing challenges requires efforts to ensure that the development and implementation of new technologies respect and promote human rights. It is imperative that the tech and related industries work towards equality, both in their perspectives and in their approach. We urge the Commission on the Status of Women to be cognizant of and urgently address bias in artificial intelligence.

We need more, better and reliable gender disaggregated data collection, analysis, reporting and monitoring. We must ensure that women and girls are visible, counted and recognized. It is critical that gender be mainstreamed into national statistics, prioritised in data collection, and reflected in innovation strategies as well as in development plans.

Investing in Women and Transforming Education

The workforce of tomorrow demands agility and responsiveness. Education and training must ensure that labour is equipped with the skills they need to handle digital technologies and that diverse expertise is available to drive innovation while also ensuring that women and girls are not left behind. There must be a collective push to channel investments in women and girls, particularly in skills development that reduces gender-based sectoral and occupational segregation. Investment is urgently needed in training women in non-traditional employment and sectors, especially in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Incentivization and collaboration with the private sector are needed to attract more women to tech jobs, and to diversify the pipeline creating these new technologies. Assessments should be made on the displacements of women in industries due to automation, artificial intelligence and deep tech.

Addressing gender disparities in new tech: the rise of blockchain, non-fungible tokens and the metaverse

Technology has the power to amplify women's narratives and multiple identities, to crystalize activism, and support actions on gender parity. With the rise of non-fungible tokens, there is a need to prepare to address gender gaps in the non-fungible token space. It is important to increase representation and participation of women and girls across all technologies. We should ensure promises are kept with blockchain to narrow the gender gap within the space and democratise engagement through decentralised technology.

The International Federation of Business and Professional Women calls upon governments gathered at the Commission on the Status of Women to:

Recall the role of equitable and inclusive quality education and promote access of girls and women to scientific and technical training for professional equality and the realization of gender justice and equality.

Recognize the twin transition of green and digital transformations as the cornerstone for delivering a sustainable, gender-fair, and competitive future.

Make available reliable gender disaggregated data collection, analysis, reporting and monitoring to ensure that women and girls are visible, counted and recognized. Mainstream gender into national statistics, prioritise data collection, and reflect in innovation strategies, as well as in development plans.

Facilitate women and girls' meaningful participation in all stages of planning and policy development on innovation and technological advancement in order to take differentiated needs into account.

Build a coherent and reliable technology ecosystem that involves women and girls.

Ensure that the academic and scientific arenas include more women and girls, by identifying the growing and declining sectors while retooling and upscaling in the education sector.

Consider the replication of Girls Congress, a International Federation of Business and Professional Women capacity-building and mentoring programme for the next generation of female leadership, currently funded under a Fulbright grant operating in the Philippines and recognized with the Education Double Gold Award from the Global Women Inventors and Innovators Network (UK) for leveraging the use of technology to equip girls to propel development themselves.

Increase funding commitments in women and girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and encourage business to ensure more women in the boardroom and in technological positions.

Continue to work in the fulfilment of women and girls' rights, recognizing intersectionality and the diversity of lived realities and circumstances, while leveraging technology to help accelerate progress in the achievement of gender equality.

Invest in developing and growing an entrepreneurial ecosystem that promotes and enables more women to start and grow technology companies. Mandate private and public sector procurement targets for sourcing from women-owned technology firms.

We live in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world. Full participation by women and girls in a technologically-abled world would transform VUCA to mean, instead, having the Vision, Understanding, Commitment and Agility to ensure we can build back better, stronger and together. Digital technologies are key enablers for a gender-just, equitable, resilient and sustainable future. We call on collective action to reach the transformative goals that we have set for women and girls to become the very best version of themselves.
