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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
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entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century"**

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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.

Statement

Title: Digital learning as a valuable tool for gender equity

This statement is presented by the Canadian Federation of University Women, with partner organizations, on behalf of its 6,500 members, a non-partisan organization of women working together to advocate for gender equality. The Canadian Federation of University Women would like to stress the opportunities in digital learning for propelling gender equality forward: if utilized properly, digital learning can offer women and girls skills to be agents in their own development.

We support the work of UNICEF and UNESCO Gateways to Public Digital Learning Initiative, the Generation Equality Forum, and local organizations working to address the digital divide and encourage further funding for those working on the ground and making an impact. Our statement aligns with the thematic action tracks of the UN Transforming Education Summit which focuses on inclusivity, equity, resourcing teachers, skills for life, digital learning opportunities and the financing of digital education (Concept Note, 2022). We also emphasize the Generation Equality Forum's core principles of intersectionality, feminist leadership and transformation which are essential for programme planning and dismantling systems of oppression, to ensure a truly equitable future for all (Generation Equality Accountability Report, 2022).

We stress the need to prioritize funding and programming towards the most marginalized in the global South, who have significantly less adaptive capacity in the face of challenges such as the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data in the Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, the gender snapshot 2022, found that in 29 countries surveyed on secondary school completion, the poorest rural girls had a completion rate of 11.5 percent, while the richest urban girls had a rate of completion of 72.2 percent (2022). This snapshot highlights the importance of disaggregated data and of investing in the most marginalized. Developing more "low-technology" such as radio and television education programs, could be an interim pathway to promote accessibility. During the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures led to an increased reliance on distance learning, where 80-85 percent of high income countries adapted, while less than 50 percent of learners in low-income countries had similar access (UN Sustainable Development Group [UN SDG] Policy Brief, 2020). With the increasing incidence of forced displacement due to war and climate, and 6 out of 10 targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education incorporating technology, continued support by member states is essential.

Despite improved access to digital learning, under-skilled and under-resourced teachers will mean that students continue to lag behind. UNESCO highlighted that one-third of students lacked education access for over a year during the COVID-19 pandemic due to insufficient access to digital learning systems (UNESCO Gateways to Public Digital Learning, 2022). Digital divides prevent access to digital learning, and illuminate the lack of technology infrastructure and low digital literacy levels of teachers, students and parents (UN SDG Policy Brief, 2020). A UN SDG policy brief on education during COVID-19 cited that 64 percent of primary teachers, and 50 percent of secondary teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa lacked training on basic digital skills (2020), leaving a gap for in-person learning and distance education. Partnerships should be encouraged between countries, educational organizations and industry, to share best practices in professional development for teachers and establish international norms and standards for learning platforms, while accommodating for sociocultural context (2020).

Another concern is the gender digital divide in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce. As of 2016, women comprised only 19.9% of the STEM labour participation market globally (UN Women Gender Snapshot, 2022). Low participation rates of women in STEM subjects starts early, when teachers and parents can have a significant impact on perpetuating or disrupting bias and norms around work

"best suited" for women (2022). Further, the work environment in STEM fields are often male-centric, inflexible and exclusionary, making it more difficult for women, especially those with care responsibilities, to enter and excel in these fields (2022). Technology innovations by women for women can have a powerful effect on the accessibility of information and tools in education, reproductive health, leadership skills and economic opportunities. The Generation Equality Forum highlights how gender-transformative networks can help design tools to better prevent, detect and respond to online gender-based violence, and how feminist policies at national or corporate levels can boost women's inclusion and leadership in the digital world (OECD Bridging the Digital Gender Divide, 2018).

Finally, we know women and girls are at increased risk of digital harassment and gender-based cyberviolence; 28 percent of women globally have experienced online violence, and the incidence is higher amongst younger women (Generation Equality Accountability Report, 2022). We insist that member states, in planning and funding women and girls' digital education, mandate technology safety and invest in cybersecurity and cyberviolence accountability mechanisms to protect women and girls online. Open educational resources that are freely accessible offer opportunities for shared knowledge and accessible materials, however, every digital space must educate and address risks to safeguard educational benefits and robust participation for women and girls. Taking a feminist, intersectional and gender-transformational approach requires us to not only acknowledge the differences in experience of gender diversity in technology, but harness the power of that diversity to lead us to new areas of innovation.

How do we best promote policies and opportunities for gender equity in digital learning while women and girls still face inequality and accessibility challenges? The 2022-2025 UN Women Strategic Plan cites that less than half (48 percent) of women globally actually use the internet (compared to 55 percent of men) (2021). Addressing the affordability of technology and internet access is integral for assuring the right to education and free speech in our globalized world. Women and girls' human rights will be enhanced by digital learning if member states address current systemic barriers including cyberviolence, lack of access to technology and poor digital literacy (UNCSW67 Priority Theme NGO Survey, 2022). Taking a rights-based approach creates impetus for action by member states: where financing education can be considered a common good not only for our individual countries and citizens, but for the collective goal of peace, justice, human rights and sustainable development for current and future generations. As outlined by the UN Transforming Education Summit, countries providing official development assistance can fulfill their role in affirming the right to education for all by boosting international assistance for education that addresses gender equitable access to digital learning. Further, they can identify key actions to take domestically and internationally to respond to the disruptions to education brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (UN Transforming Education Concept Note, 2022). Currently, only 4.6% of bilateral allocable official development assistance goes to programmes where gender equality is the main objective (UN Women Gender Snapshot, 2022). Again, bringing in principles such as intersectionality, feminist leadership, and transforming systems, is essential for addressing our global education crisis.

With a matter of urgency, the Canadian Federation of University Women and its partners petition the 67th Commission and Member States to:
1. Increase funding to improve accessibility to technology and technological infrastructure in rural areas, in the global North and global South, for the most marginalized including women and girls, Indigenous populations, older adults and people with disabilities.

2. Fund partnerships to create international norms around digital education that include training and address digital equity issues on accessibility, online data privacy and protection, cybersecurity and cyberviolence in all technological education for girls and women.

3. Prioritize funding for digital learning and resources for teachers and students as distance learning evolves.

4. Encourage girls from a young age to seek digital learning to increase representation of women in STEM, offer girls and women employable skills, and break down sociocultural norms and other barriers to women entering the workforce.

5. Recommend national governments channel financial resources to make internet and technology more affordable and accessible for rural populations and women and girls. Digital learning is now integral to the attainment of the human right to education.

6. Prioritize sustainable streams of funding for women-led innovations in technology including to address women's education, gender-based violence, economic empowerment, and access to reproductive health.

7. Invest in monitoring and evaluation of digital learning programs and tools, and institute international norms around knowledge sharing, data and best practices.