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38th session of the Human Rights Council

Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women

Panel 2: Advancing women's rights in the economic sphere through access and participation in information and communication technologies (ICTs)

Concept note (draft as of 4 June 2018)

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Date and venue:	**22 June 2018, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.**, Palais des Nations, Room XX, Geneva *(will be broadcast live and archived on http://webtv.un.org)*
Objectives:	To discuss the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs), in particular the internet, to accelerate the advancement of women's rights in the economic sphere. Women's meaningful access to and participation in ICTs is vital to advance gender equality and women's and girls' rights in practice towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As ICTs continue to transform the way society operates, this will be an opportunity for States, United Nations entities, civil society and other stakeholders to discuss ways to ensure women have equal access to online resources and are able to seize opportunities that participation in ICTs offers.
Chair:	**H.E. Mr. Vojislav Šuc**, President of the Human Rights Council (TBC)
Opening statement:	**Ms. Kate Gilmore**, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
Keynote speech:	**H.E. Ms. Eva Kjer Hansen**, *Minister for Fisheries and Equal Opportunities and Minister for Nordic Cooperation of Denmark*
Moderator:	**Ms. Marisol Alarcón**, *Partner & Vice President of Partnerships, Laboratoria* (Ecuador)
Panellists:	● **Ms. Rokhaya Solange Ndir**, *Head of Digital Ecosystem Relations, Sonatel* (Senegal) ● **Ms. Chenai Chair**, *Researcher & Communications and Evaluations Manager, Research ICT Africa* (Zimbabwe) ● **Mr. Basheerhamad Shadrach**, *Coordinator for Asia, Alliance for Affordable Internet, World Wide Web Foundation* (India)
Outcome:	A summary report of the panel discussion will be prepared.
Mandate:	In its resolutions 6/30 and 35/10, the Human Rights Council reaffirmed the principle of gender equality and the need for the full implementation of the human rights of women and decided to hold an annual full-day of discussion on the human rights of women. The second panel discussion will address ICTs as a tool for advancing women's rights in the economic sphere.
Format:	The duration of the panel discussion will be strictly limited to two hours. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including opening statements, moderator comments, if any, panellist presentations, and their responses to questions and concluding remarks. Speaking time limits for the panellists and guests, if any, will be calculated based on the maximum one hour limit for the podium.
	States and observers, including national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), intervening from the floor will also have a maximum of one hour. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. The list of speakers for the discussion will be established at the beginning of the panel and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups will be moved to the beginning of the list. The practice of having two slots for Member and observer States (2x12), NHRIs (2x1) and NGOs (2x2) will be maintained but the possibility for panellists to intervene in-between will depend entirely on the time used at the start of the panel.
	Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).
Background:	ICTs have radically changed the way society operates, and they continue to transform every aspect of life. Equally, there is an increasing recognition of the role of ICTs as key enablers of human rights and development, including achieving the SDGs. States are aiming to 'significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal

and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020' under Sustainable Development Goal 9.c.

ICTs can provide great opportunities for women's and girls' rights. Long-distance education may provide better access to education for girls living in remote areas. Audio-visual aids applications in ICTs may enable more autonomous life for women and girls with disabilities. Online information and service on sexual and reproductive health and rights may provide women and girls better access to such information and services and thus enable them to made more autonomous decisions about their bodies and lives. Moreover, ICTs can provide new resources for women's economic participation by creating business and employment opportunities. For example, access to ICTs could enable women, including rural women, to run or improve their business through using online market forecasts or financial services, marketing their products and services online, developing and expanding their network.

Gender equality in economic participation and opportunity is fundamental to women's enjoyment of numerous human rights, including their rights to work, education, food, adequate housing, health, as well as to political participation and equality in family relations. However, the [Global Gender Gap Report 2017](#) indicates that the gender gap in economic participation has been widening in the past five years.

While there has been a global decrease in the digital divide, the gender digital divide has recently grown from 11 per cent in 2013 to 12 per cent in 2016. Generally, the gender divide in digital technology is larger in low- and middle-income countries, though it exists in both developed and developing countries. The "fourth industrial revolution" being caused by rapid automatization may replace many conventional jobs with machines, while creating jobs which require new skills. Low representation of women and girls in education, workforce and leadership in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields would place women and girls at higher risk of losing out from this shift in business and employment.

The factors behind the gender digital divide are multiple and complex and often linked to social norms, bias and gender stereotypes as well as gender discrimination offline. For example, the disproportionate burden women and girls bear for unpaid domestic and care work impact upon their time to use ICTs. Harmful gender stereotypes which perceive girls as 'inherently not tech savvy' may discourage girls to pursue education and occupation in STEM fields. Women may have less access to financial resources, due to discriminatory laws and practices, thus have less means to afford ICT devices or better connection to the internet. Online job advertisement generated by artificial intelligence may propose less highly-paid job opportunities to women, compared to men, due to the bias in the data used for machine learning. Responses to close the gender digital divide would need not only to increase women and girls' access to ICTs but also to address pervasive online and offline gender discrimination.

With resolution 32/13, the Council affirmed the importance of applying a comprehensive human rights-based approach in providing and expanding access to the internet, while calling on all States to address the gender digital divide. Likewise, [OHCHR report](#) pursuant to resolution 32/13 acknowledged that a human rights-based approach to bridging the gender digital divide is fundamental to addressing the full range of human rights that are affected by ICTs.

Background documents:	[General Assembly resolution 70/1](#) (25 September 2015), Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [Human Rights Council resolution 32/13](#) (1 July 2016), The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the internet - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet: ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective (5 May 2017), [A/HRC/35/9](#) - Internet Governance Forum. Output documents of the Best Practice Forums on Gender: [Best Practice Forum Gender & Access (2017)](#): Unique challenges for unique women [Best Practice Forum Gender & Access (2016)](#): Overcoming Barriers to Enable Women's Meaningful Internet Access