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the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable
development: the role of digital technologies on social
development and well-being of all**

Statement submitted by International Council of Women, International Kolping Society, Latter-Day Saint Charities, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

We recognize that sustainable social development requires a holistic approach, that emphasizes the integration of economic and social policy, while enhancing human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability, and are aware that it can lead to genuine lasting and sustainable improvements in human well-being.

We are further aware, that the post-Rio de Janeiro Summit on Sustainable Development in 1992, and the post Copenhagen Era, with the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, have both given impetus to transformative social development that develops structures and deals not just with symptoms, or a web of safety nets, particularly in an increasingly globalised world. Various United Nations agencies, studies and reports could lead to the conclusion that sustainable change and development, can only be lasting, with the inclusion of an inclusive social perspective.

As a consequence, Sustainable Social Development is both environment sensitive and human sensitive, guided by human rights, and could further greatly benefit from the continued integration of issues relating, not only to individuals, but also to families and the communities they live in.

In a global health crisis, such as we are currently experiencing, the need for both a holistic and systemic approach, encompassing synergies of social and technological transformation, have been given increased impetus. Natural disasters, such as fire, flooding and water shortages, which we are also currently experiencing, further draw our attention to the need for critical, secure and resilient infrastructures, which are also capable of dealing with such natural disasters.

We are becoming increasingly aware of the positive role digital technology is playing in social development, such as broadband connectivity. Multiple international studies already show the benefits of progress in reaching the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals and their one hundred and sixty-nine targets, set by the global community in the United Nations, and document that the online sector has also already been contributing towards increasing progress, across all Goals. This has further enabled national efforts to develop knowledge economies, leading to digital transformation in government services, offering greater value for citizens.

We are however also mindful, that 2019 was the first year that more than fifty percent of the world's population, of over seven billion, was online, with access to the world-wide-web. Further, the proportion of women using the internet globally is forty eight percent, compared to fifty eight percent of men, pointing to a gender inequality. The International Telecommunication Union, which is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies, also however documents that three point six billion, or forty six percent of the world population, continued to be without online access in 2019, particularly in least developed countries, despite the fact that ninety three percent of the global population is within reach of mobile broadband. This has become known as the Digital Divide. In the present ongoing global health emergency, the introduction of digital technology in the educational sector is also becoming increasingly evident, in a number of countries. These measures can further contribute to increasing sustainable social development, especially with the accessibility to open source knowledge resources. However, this in turn, can lead to an acceleration of the so-called Educational Divide, already in evidence by the fact that about two hundred and fifty eight million children and youth, were out of school world-wide in 2018, without access to acquiring digital capabilities and skills, including the safe use of the internet, the ability to deal with malicious mobile applications, possible sexual harassment or mobbing in social media.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization reminds us how important the first one thousand days of a child's life, from conception to its second birthday are, for its long-term development and well-being. We are further aware, that the education of a child's parents, especially with regard to nutrition, is critical in this phase. The foundation for the parents' development and well-being was also set in their own first one thousand days. Education could hence be regarded as the best guarantee for this cycle to function. Each family is, in its own right, also a micro educational knowledge resource, perhaps quite wealthy in cumulative emotional knowledge resources, and social competencies and skills. These factors could make their members aware of the need to appreciate, cultivate and treasure the various natural resources available to them, and their fellow human beings, which are vital for environmental sustainability and the well-being of all. Hence, Education for Sustainable Social Inclusion, in fact begins within a family setting, and not just when a child begins its school years. Education per se, including those first steps in education acquired in the family setting, could be regarded as a passport to meaningful participation and influence in creating an inclusive social and sustainable society, for the well-being of all.

We hence recommend a renewed, increased, and concerted global approach to reducing and avoiding, both the Digital Divide and the Educational Divide, by increased and sustainable capacity building of both communication and educational infrastructures by governments, which in turn can lead to the empowerment of individuals, families and communities.

The failure to take cognisance of a families-focused approach to national and international co-operation for sustainable social development could endanger losing the input of a sphere of partners, directly involved in the intricate day-to-day problems, affecting and shaping society.

Finally, we trust that preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations International Year of the Family in 2024 will re-emphasise the permanence of issues relating to families in the work and programmes of the Commission for Social Development, and continue to recognise families as the fundamental cornerstone of society, just as numerous United Nations conferences have done, since the Rio de Janeiro Summit in 1992.
