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Side-event in the frames of the Commission on the Status of Women 58th Session

ICT and the Internet as Powerful Means in Advancing the Rights and Empowerment of Women and Girls

Possibilities and Challenges

Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium
12 March 11:30-12:45

- **H.E. Mr. Urmas Paet**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia
- **Ms. Helen Clark**, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (Chair of the Broadband Commission Working Group on Gender)
- **H.E. Ms. Baasanjav Otgonjargal**, State Secretary, Ministry of Population Development and Social Protection of Mongolia
- **H.E. Mr. Charles T. Ntwaagae**, Permanent Representative of Botswana to the United Nations
- **Ms. Lakshmi Puri**, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, Deputy Executive Director of United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
- **Ms. Madeline Earp**, Research Analyst, Freedom on the Net, Freedom House

Moderated by: **Ms. Jac sm Kee**, Manager of the Women's Rights Programme, Association for Progressive Communications

For RSVP and further information, please contact Ms Pille Kesler, Mission of Estonia to the United Nations:

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Concept Note

ICT and the Internet as Powerful Means in Advancing the Rights and Empowerment of Women and Girls Possibilities and Challenges

Freedom of opinion and expression, one of the central topics of the event, whether it be online or offline, is a cornerstone of every democratic society and a fundamental right of every person. Access to internet and freedom online can significantly contribute to promoting and furthering also other human rights. Online access encompasses the right to participate in decision-making processes and can be a vital tool for women's empowerment. From early on, the opportunities for women in ICT have been recognized for example in the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) in the 2003 Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, and various other conferences and documents.

In practice however, women and girls do not have equitable access to the Internet - according to the ITU estimates (2013), some 200 million fewer women are online, compared with men. In addition, women exercising their freedom of expression online face serious challenges and threats all over the world. There is a clear gender gap when it comes to women and girls accessing the Internet and other new technologies. In this light, the key question is how can enhancing access to and accessibility of the Internet lead to the empowerment of women and girls and the reduction on gender inequalities across the board.

There are already many good examples from around the world on how women have successfully used social media and online news platforms to various ends: rallying support for reforms in the legal systems of the states, gaining access to markets to expand economic opportunities, engaging constituencies to promote women's participation and monitoring incidents to enhance safety. To harvest the full potential of these initiatives equal access to the Internet is essential.

In this context, the event will touch upon three interrelated aspects:

- The relation between access to ICTs and the Internet and the empowerment women and girls
- The promotion of overall human rights for women and girls via the Internet and related platforms
- The opportunities, threats and challenges that the new technologies bring to women and girls

Women's and girls' access to the ICT as well as freedom online along with overall human rights promotion are crucial for long-term sustainable development. Therefore, the topic is particularly relevant in the light of the ongoing discussions on post-2015 development agenda.

The event will among others also contribute to the outcome paper on recommendations for freedom online, prepared by multistakeholder working group for the high level conference of Freedom Online Coalition taking place in Tallinn on 28-29 April, 2014.