

28 February 2007

Fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Parallel event on

ICT is the Key: Global Development, Empowerment and Gender

Equality, the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against the

Girl Child

28 February 2007

Closing Remarks by Ms. Carolyn Hannan

Director, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women

Distinguished delegates,

Representatives of the private sector, civil society and the UN system,

Colleagues and friends,

Today's event has shown that information and communication technologies are a critical component of the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against girls. I would like to thank all of the presenters for their contributions to the discussions on this important

topic. I would also like to express my thanks to participants whose active involvement and enthusiasm have ensured a stimulating debate.

Discussions throughout the day have highlighted a number of important areas related to ICT and the elimination of violence and discrimination against the girl-child. In improving access to ICT by girls and young women, Alicia Young emphasized that that role models are the key to increasing girls' access to and interest in ICT. She encouraged women working in private companies to mentor young women and girls and stated that efforts should be made to eliminate gender-based stereotypes which prevent girls and young women from choosing science and technology courses and careers. Furthermore, Sandy Carter of IBM noted some of the major challenges to girls' access to ICT and careers in science and technology and highlighted an innovative program that holds camps in many different countries to encourage the involvement of girls in the ICT sector. She also challenged the private sector representatives here to implement similar programs in their own organizations to increase women's and girls' access to ICT and I hope you will take action on this.

Presenters also highlighted measures to enhance the empowerment of women and girls through ICT. For example, Niki Armacost, Vice President of Women's World Banking, described the technological innovations in the field of micro-finance, which is a proven strategy for increasing the economic empowerment of women, especially those living in poverty. She also noted that women's economic empowerment leads to their increased involvement in the life of their communities and also leads to better health and education for their children. George Kell, from the United Nations Global Compact Initiative, stressed that there is a need for the United Nations and the private sector to work together to achieve development goals, including the empowerment of women and that, in our globalizing world, this is becoming more and more of a necessity. The need for measures to allow women better reconcile their family and work responsibilities, for instance through the introduction of flexible time arrangements and the establishment of child care facilities was also discussed by panelists and representatives of civil society organizations who made interventions from the floor.

Finally, panellists addressed the threat of ICT-based violence against girls and young women. They discussed the need to ensure online safety for girls and highlighted the ways in which business, government and civil society can help. There is also a need to strike a balance between protecting girls and giving them access to ICT, as Mavic Cabrera-Bazella from the International Women's Tribune Center pointed out. Ms. Cabrera-Bazella highlighted interesting initiatives carried out in different parts of the world to raise awareness on the issue of violence against women and girls perpetrated through ICT, whilst also underlining the need to ensure that women and girls have access to ICT which, when utilized correctly, offer great opportunities for their empowerment.

As I mentioned this morning in my introductory presentation, many Member States are raising the importance of ICT in their national statements to the Commission on the Status of Women. They are raising many of the issues you have discussed here today. This is an indication of the increasing awareness of the potential of ICT in all areas being considered by the Commission.

I hope that you have found the discussions in this conference to be interesting and informative. Most of all, I hope that this event will lead to the formulation of partnerships, strategies and action plans aimed at eliminating violence and discrimination against girls and empowering girls and young women through ICT.

Finally, I would like to say a word of thanks to Mike and Carol Lackey and all their partners for the initiative and the drive to make this conference a reality. I also thank our collaborating partners in the UN, the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination and the Global Alliance for ICT and Development. And I thank all participants for their insights and contributions.