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CCA's Statement on International Women's Day–2023 “DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality”

The observance of International Women's Day (IWD) by the United Nations recognises the importance of the role of women and girls who are championing the advancement of transformative technology and digital education. It is heartening that the UN has taken the initiative to alert the international community by calling for a focus on the impact of the digital gender gap on widening economic and social inequalities. The theme of International Women's Day (IWD)–2023, “DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality”, is an opportunity to address the impact of the digital gender gap on widening economic and social inequalities, to revisit the gendered impacts of innovation and technology, and to identify pathways that will allow for a more inclusive and equitable world.

The digital revolution has been a seismic shift that has shaped the 21st century. Technology has greatly improved people's quality of life by easing communication and information access as well as by tackling large-scale development and humanitarian issues. However, it must also be recognised that technology can perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination, as well as exacerbate existing social, economic, and political disparities. While the digital revolution offers immense potential to improve social and economic outcomes for women, it also has the potential to reinforce and embed existing patterns of gender inequality and limit the equitable distribution of the benefits of digital transformation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the digital gender divide, with women and girls most disproportionately affected by the lack of access to technology and the internet. The pandemic has also exposed the way technology can be used to perpetrate violence against women, through activities like cyberstalking, harassment, and online abuse, which ranges from identity-based insults to targeted harassment and attacks on privacy; the unique harassments faced online include the possibilities of anonymous attacks, the ease of “viralising” harmful and hateful content to an expanded audience, the difficulty of removing content once it is on the internet, and woefully inadequate regulation by internet service providers and online social media giants. Digital violence is not a phenomenon that is isolated from other forms of violence. Unhindered and conducive digital access is key to promoting awareness of the rights that women and girls hold, to increasing civic engagement, and to the full and free expression of ideas and opinions. The digital revolution, the fruits of which will be enjoyed for generations to come, can be a positive driver-of-change for gender equality and women's empowerment by expanding access to information, knowledge, essential public services, and opportunities for the full participation of women and girls in socio-economic and political life.

On this International Women's Day, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) affirms its commitment to standing in solidarity with women and girls around the world and to using our platform, voice, and resources to advocate for gender equality and justice. The CCA calls upon its member constituencies and ecumenical partners to deepen their understanding of digital inequalities and address, to the best of their capacities, the barriers that women and girls face in the productive use of digital technologies and science.

Two key areas in which churches and faith-based organisations in Asia can make a meaningful impact are in promoting affordability and addressing harmful social norms. Affordable access and a supportive social environment can enable women and girls to thrive in their use of digital technologies. Churches and faith-based organisations must promote community awareness and education campaigns to eliminate discriminatory norms and attitudes that underpin gender-based discrimination and violence. Churches in Asia must engage themselves in ending harmful attitudes and behaviours in their constituencies. Churches and faith-based organisations must also make available pastoral care for women and girls who have experienced online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

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